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# TOP-NOTCH

STREET  
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SMITH

Edited by BURT L. STANDISH

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Vol. 4, No. 4

MID-MONTH ISSUE



THE TWICE-A-MONTH YOUNG MAN'S MAGAZINE

Victor J. ...



*B E G I N S   I N   T H E   N E X T   I S S U E*

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# HIS YANKEE LORDSHIP

By J. A. TIFFANY

A tale that will pleasantly buffalo you

**A** MERICANS going after English estates and titles have had some amusing as well as astonishing adventures, but none quite equaling what happened to the San Francisco chap who plays the leading part in this drama. It's a serial, and you'd better make sure of being on hand at the rise of the curtain.

OPENING CHAPTERS IN THE JUNE TOP-  
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*YOU'LL FIND IT ON SALE EVERYWHERE*



ISSUED THE 1st AND 15th OF EVERY MONTH

VOLUME IV

NUMBER 4

# TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE

Edited by BURT L. STANDISH

May 15

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NEXT ISSUE, THE JUNE, OUT MAY FIRST



# Talks With Top-Notch Fellows

By BURT L. STANDISH

## THE BIG TOWN'S CALL



I AM a frequent recipient of letters from young men deploring the "hard luck" that keeps them in some small community, and declaring that they will escape with the first chance that offers. They hanker for the city, just as country-bred young men have done ever since cities began to mark the plain or border the world's harbors.

Here is a letter that came to hand recently; it is the occasion of these few remarks:

"MR. BURT L. STANDISH,

"DEAR SIR: I am sick of rusting away my life in this out-of-the-way hole. I am too big for T—. The business opportunities here are too limited. I want a broader field—one about the size of New York. There I am sure I would be the right man in the right place. That is what I am looking for—the right place for a man of my talents.

"Besides, life here is a living death; in New York life seems a joy ride. I want to go to the theater, to be *au courant* with the drama, to take ocean trips. How easy it is to jump on a ship at New York! Only five days from Europe.

**"Nothing here is interesting. It's the same monotonous grind day in and day out. Why should I not see more of life? Why should I not be in the fight? Here I am out of it.**

"I am a good bookkeeper and salesman, but you can do about so much business in a hole like this and no more, no matter how smart you are. The business is not here.

"Do you not think that a young man like myself who is well and strong, and has the stuff in him for success, ought to beat it for a big town? How do you think I would make out in New York? C. G. M."



THERE was a lot more in the letter besides the full name of the writer and the village where he lives and is employed, which we will call Tanktown. He spoke of his popularity with the girls there, and the

hunch he has that he would marry a rich girl if only he could get a foothold in New York.

It strikes me, C. G. M., that yours is an exceeding common case. When you ask how I think you would make out in New York, I answer:

**You would be the same kind of a man in New York that you are in Tanktown.**

Brick and mortar, skyscrapers, crowded streets and their roar will not change you.

Evidently you are of the sort who look for success from external things. Chaps who contract that bad habit do not get rid of it in New York any more than they do in Tanktown.

Their joy rides often turn out to be journeys to and from work in crowded trains underground. Now and then one finds a broad field for his talents as driver of a bottled spring water wagon; and the glad song he sings up the dumb-waiter well is: "Put on the empties."



ONLY a small part of New York's five million are able to attend the theater evenings, so about four million nine hundred and fifty thousand stay away. White Light restaurants yawn for the larger-opportunity man, but he has to dine at the Classy Lunch at twenty cents a dine.

**He sees the gayety of the big town side-stepping him.**

He smokes his fragrant Manila in a hall bedroom that is as homelike as the Tanktown freight shed.

Despite the snap and pepper he brought with him from the despised small town, people in New York can't see him. He goes on and on, but he does not come to the lamp-post marked Easy Street.

No rich girls throw themselves at his head.



Spring comes, and, although the liners are waiting at their wharves, he does not sail for Europe. An ocean voyage to Coney Island, with Neapolitans playing last year's popular airs on the boat, is the nearest he comes to it.



ON a stool—of repentance—at the Classy Lunch, the man from Tanktown is likely to think it over, flies permitting. If he has ever been a player on the home team, he may cast his thought in this mold:

The Metropolis is a wonderful pitcher of opportunities, but to most batters she sends in baffling offshoots that make you fan the atmosphere instead of letting you crack a base hit.

Probably you have noted that in TOP-NOTCH stories, presented for your entertainment from issue to issue, American life is pictured in a wide range of territory.

**Tank towns and big cities, jerkwater burgs, all contribute their share of beauty, truth, pathos, tragedy, or comedy to our pages of live-wire fiction.**

No place on or off the map is too small or too obscure to be brought within the circle of our authors' art.

This is the effect of a well-conceived design on the part of the publishers. Coupled with it is our conviction that every community—however little it may be, as people are inclined to rate things—becomes interesting and important under the eye that sees, the heart that appreciates, and the brain that comprehends.



MY opinion is that the chap who has success in him will command it wherever he is, and that when your mind runs on going away to some place where things will be favorable, you are yielding to impulses that spell failure.

I don't say that one can never better his opportunities by changing his base.

**But I think that studying to make the best of things as you find them is the stuff of which hits are made.**

You'll have to manage wherever you go. You'll never find everything just right. Always obstacles will arise, whatever form they may assume.

There is an interesting case in point in one of the stories you will get in the next

TOP-NOTCH. The scene of it is a very small town in the South, and the way a young fellow deals with old-fogy conditions and other drawbacks show that the main thing, after all, is to be a man. This story, not a long one, is called "Flushed With Trumps."

**It is one that C. G. M. and every country chap ought to read.**



THE making of a man out of a young sport-loving New Yorker is the chief motive in one of the best complete novels we have been lucky enough to get hold of in a long time. This, under the title of "Through the Mill," will appear in the next issue.

It will show such TOP-NOTCH fellows as C. G. M.—and show it in a vivid, entertaining, dramatic way—that in Tanktown, or any other small place, success awaits the chap who sees straight and deserves to win.

"Jack Cope, Trooper," the regular army serial that you are having, will come to a close in the next number.

**But this does not mean Jack's farewell to Top-Notch readers.**

The author tells us that he will be able to finish the sequel, upon which he has been at work some weeks, in time for the mid-month June number. Another Jack Cope serial will begin immediately after the close of the present one. I am sure this is good news to you, as it is to the editors. We had arranged with Mr. Fessendon for the sequel, but he was afraid that his engagements would not permit him to deliver the manuscript so soon. There will be no break, therefore, in the story itself, although the second part of it will bear a new title.



THERE are lots of other splendid features in the next number, and I wish I could go over them with you here; but you see I am at the end of my two pages.

You will find announcements of the new good things on the covers and the page following this, and it is well worth your while to read them.

Taken all in all, I consider this June number a remarkably attractive one for the many sport stories it will contain, not to speak of anything else.



# A Great Sport Number

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Among the features  
of the next issue are

## Four Splendid Stories of Sport,

each written by  
a star in his line.  
They are:



All to appear in the  
June number of

## Top-Notch

Out May first. Ten  
cents a copy. On  
sale everywhere.

## THE LAST LAP

By J. Raymond Elderdice.

A complete novelette of Western  
Maryland College and the running track.

## WILD HORSE'S THREE BAGGER

By Edmund K. Goldsborough, Jr.

A long complete baseball story, with  
a College Indian as the hero.

## HIS SEVENTH OAR

By Joshua D. Evans.

This is a long, complete boating yarn;  
one that will interest everybody.

## THE KING-PIN LIGHTWEIGHT

By Harold C. Burr.

Boxing tale, and a corker, as you will  
be sure to declare.

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# The June Top-Notch



# TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE

VOL. IV

MAY 15, 1911

No. 4

## Back of the Stage

By Albert Payson Terhune

When enjoying a play or a vaudeville show, do you ever think of the unseen actors—the men who set the scene, run the electric lights, paint the scenery and make the frames that support it; the wardrobe girl, the call boy and the jolly or grumpy old chap at the stage door? Most people in the audience forget them, yet they have a lot to do, as you may guess, with making the entertainment a success. Mr. Terhune, in a sympathetic and dramatic way, has put them into this fascinating tale of a clever young man's adventure as a stage hand.

(A COMPLETE NOVEL)

### CHAPTER I.

#### A RESCUE AND A FIND.

WHEN Max Cary decided to tickle Fortune in New York, destiny put a marked flavor of the theatrical in her bill of events. But always the fight that he was called upon to make bore the brand of reality. For example:

As Max turned the corner from East Twenty-third Street that night, he saw a little man fighting gallantly, desperately, with a science and tough strength that allowed him to hold his own. But three to one were the odds that confronted him as he backed against the billboard fence and met the rush of a trio of dock rats.

The battle had reached its climax just as Max rounded the corner. Having taken in the picture, he glanced up and down both streets. In every direction the river-edge highways were deserted. It was nearly two a. m. Not even a policeman was in sight.

Max never clearly knew how it happened—he had no conscious volition—but on the instant some hereditary instinct of fair play carried him into the fight. He flung himself forward, swinging with his right. The blow, aided by the impetus of his rush, caught the nearest of the trio of ruffians flush upon the corner of his half-averted jaw before the man was aware of the newcomer's presence. Down went the dock rat as though all his joints had of a sudden turned to hot tallow. And he lay, asprawl, in the muddy gutter.

In the same businesslike manner, Max took care of the second assailant, who ran into a stomach blow that doubled him forward just as a second straight lead crashed into his jaw. He stumbled backward, fell, spread-eagle fashion, scrambled to his feet, and ran staggeringly down the street.

Max, in a side glance, had a vision of the little man against the fence shak-



ing off at last the third long-armed tough's embrace and flying at him like an angry cat; and this chap also took to his heels.

The assailant first put to sleep still lay huddled in the gutter.

The little defender coolly readjusted his own collar and gorgeous tie, then strolled across, with hand outstretched, to Max.

"Son," he observed somewhat thickly, "thanks; and then some. You did me a real turn that time. You sure can scrap. Now, let's see if you can run. You'll need to."

"I don't understand," said Cary, puzzled.

"No? You don't know this water-side bunch as I do. Those guys made a getaway and left their pal asleep here. But don't get the idea they've gone for keeps, because they haven't. They've made a break for the nearest rum foundry where they can round up a handful of their gang. Then back they'll come, making war medicine. And an hour or two from now a stray cop will find us two chaps lying here, done up and robbed. Faster, man!"

As he had talked, the little man had gripped Max's arm, and was dragging him as fast as he could toward Twenty-third Street.

"Still, I don't understand——" began Max.

But the little man broke in:

"You've got all the rest of your sweet life to understand things in. But unless we can get into civilization or in range of a cop within the next three minutes—say, son, is that the fastest you know how to run? I guess you were built for endurance rather than for speed. I—— *Hey!*"

This last word was howled Apache fashion at a taxicab that spun past westward, having presumably just deposited a passenger at the Twenty-third Street Ferry.

The chauffeur heard, turned his head, and caught sight of two running men. As it was quite light enough for him to see that both were more or less well dressed, he slowed down his machine.

The little man, several steps in ad-

vance of Max, flew at the door, jerked it open, and threw himself inside like a sack of grain.

"Jump in!" he cried to Max.

"I—I haven't any cash," stammered Cary, hesitating on the step.

"Who asked if you had?" snapped the other. "I've got enough to buy a milk route and three aeroplanes. And I'm the one who's blowing you to this joy ride. Jump aboard—unless you want to stay and be beaten up."

Through the stillness of the East Side came a dull thud, thud of heavy feet; far off, but coming steadily nearer. Max needed no further inducement. He had heard of the water-front gangs, and had read of men found on the river-front streets senseless or worse and stripped of money and clothing. Into the taxicab he climbed, and settled down alongside his little host.

"Where to?" queried the chauffeur.

"For an hour's spin anywhere at all," answered the little man, "and wind up the trip in Herald Square."

Off went the taxicab. The two passengers eyed each other; then, unaccountably, burst into a hearty, long laugh.

"Son," observed the stranger, "you helped me out fine to-night. They'd 'a' got me but for you."

"Acquaintances of yours?" asked Max. "How did you happen——"

"Acquaintances?" echoed the other in lofty scorn. "Of mine? Why, they were thugs! And I'm—I'm a gentleman. Any one can see that. Here's the proof."

To Max Cary's amazement, the speaker dived both hands into pocket after pocket, and solemnly fished out big handfuls of money.

He piled up the bills—green and yellow—upon his lap.

## CHAPTER II.

### A UNION CARD.

"Pretty sight, hey?" the little chap commented, with modest pride. "Nine hundred and eighteen dollars, not counting a fistful of chicken-feed silver. I've always wanted to be a per-



fect gentleman. And now at last I am the real cheese. Is the light good enough for you to see this layout of clothes I'm wearing? It set me back just eighty-three dollars to-day."

"Those toughs knew you had money with you? It was a holdup, then."

"Well, did it look like a christening party? Of course, they knew. It was my own fault. A swell like me has no right to go slumming. You see, I didn't get the money till to-day. Then, after I bought the clothes, I went down the line and maybe swallowed just a drop or so more than I really needed."

"Well?"

"And along about an hour ago I remembered a feller I used to chum with. I thought maybe he'd like to see his old pal dressed up like a horse. And perhaps he might be glad of a little loan, too. I'd heard he was keeping a cigar store somewhere over on Avenue A or B, near Twenty-third Street. I went over there. The first tobacco shop I stopped at to make inquiries, I thought I'd help along trade by buying a few cigars. I pulled out a bunch of bills—like a wall-eyed fool. I knew what a break I'd made, the minute I'd done it. And I made a getaway. Those three toughs were in the place, and they followed me. They caught up with me just where you found us. That scrap cleared my head, all right. Just the same, I'm glad to be away from there. Wealth's a big responsibility."

"I'd like to experience it," laughed Max rather bitterly.

The other was quick to note the young fellow's odd tone.

"Broke?" he asked.

"Stone broke," answered Cary.

"Let me slip you a handful of this——"

"No," said Max quietly.

"But I've got such a lot of it," persisted the other, "I can easy afford to spare you a——"

"But I can't afford to take it," replied Max. "Thanks, ever so much, just the same."

"But——"

"Please don't let's speak of it any

more," interrupted Max. "It's more interesting to hear about success than failure. You say you didn't get your money till to-day? A legacy?"

"Yes—from Wall Street. This morning I struck good old New York from a year in Chicago. I had a job waiting for me here; a good one as jobs go. I wasn't due at it till to-morrow morning. I had a few dollars left, but, what is more, I had the right tip on cotton—got it in Chicago. Heard about Allen's big killing to-day in the cotton market? It's in the evening papers. Well, I got in right and ran my little bundle of money up to this!" He patted the big wads of bills in his pockets. "I don't know even yet how I did it. Never was in Wall Street before in my life. Gee! It's fine to be rich!"

He stretched himself back on the seat with a rapturous sigh, and pulled out a huge cigar.

"Yesterday," he mused complacently, "I was Karl Floyd, member in good and regular standing of the Stage Employees' International Alliance, with a promise of a job at the Hyperion Theater at twenty-eight dollars a week. And it actually looked good to me. To-night I'm Mr. Karl Floyd, Esquire, gentleman of leisure, with more'n nine hundred dollars."

"A nice nest egg," commented Max, "to fall back on in case of hard luck. With your twenty-eight dollars a week you——"

"What?" scoffed Floyd. "Work while I've got all this cush in my clothes? Son, don't make me laugh. I had a tooth pulled the other day, and my jaw's sore."

"It's a queer old world," muttered Cary, half to himself. "Here are you with nearly a thousand dollars and turning your back on a job. While I have neither job nor money and can't get either."

"You were looking for both of them in a funny place and at a funny hour of night, when I first met you," observed Floyd.

"I was looking for nothing," answered Max. "I had no place to sleep.



I was walking the streets waiting for morning to come, so that I could start on my work hunt again."

"H'm! Those clothes of yours don't look like a tramp's. And you're shaved."

"I'm not a tramp—yet. And my last fifteen cents went for a shave this afternoon. A fellow must look neat if he expects to get employment."

"What put you in the pavement-pounding class?"

"Nothing dramatic or interesting. I came to New York to push an invention of mine—a patent tally record for grain and coal elevators. I know it's a good thing. And the agent into whose hands I put it says it may be practicable. He's trying to interest some elevator firms in it. But he says it'll probably be six months at least before we can get a single firm to take it up. In the meantime I've got to eat."

"Can't go back home, hey?"

"No. At least, I won't. I'll starve first. My family and my friends have always laughed at me for putting all my time on inventions. When I came to New York with this one, they prophesied I'd have to walk all the way home. And I won't do it," he ended fiercely.

"I understand. And in the meantime you've got to live on pride pudding. It's a pity, 'specially for a lad that can box as you can."

"I held the middleweight boxing championship at college," said Max a little proudly. "Besides inventions, it was my one accomplishment. But it won't feed me."

"Say," suggested Floyd. "How'd you like my job?"

"Fine!" cried Cary.

"Hold on! You don't know what it is."

"I don't care, either. I'd take in back stairs to clean, if necessary. Anything to tide me over till my invention——"

"Do you know anything about theaters?"

"Why," stammered Max, "I've been to a few shows. And I was leading

man in our College Dramatic Society for a——"

"Pshaw! I don't mean from the front of the stage. I mean, do you know anything about the real game?"

"The real game? I don't understand."

"No more does any of the dear public," growled Floyd. "Folks go to a show. They sit there and watch nine or ten actors do stunts, and they think that's the whole game. A man might as well look at the people on one ferry-boat and then say he'd had a full sight of New York's business activities."

"Then the——"

"The theater life is a world by itself," preached Floyd. "And the actors are only one end of it. How about the stage hands, the carpenters, the ushers, the stage-door man, the electricians, the house force, and——"

"What are you? A——"

"I am a gentleman of leisure. I used to be a stage hand. See? Here's my union card," he added, drawing out an envelope and opening it. "And here's the letter engaging me for the Hyperion. Now watch me light my cigar with those same precious documents."

He struck a match, held it to the corner of the envelope; then, on second thought, blew it out.

"I forgot," said he. "I asked you a while ago how you'd like my job. And you said you would. Does that still go?"

"Of course. But——"

"Then here's my union card, and here's the letter. Hand 'em to the house manager at the Hyperion in the morning and——"

"Hold on," expostulated Max. "You forget, I know nothing of the business. They would find that out in five minutes."

"That's right," agreed Floyd. "The letter and the card aren't enough. You've got to have one thing more."

"What?"

"A swell outfit of bluff. With that you can land it. Without that, you couldn't even win out as chauffeur for an ash cart."



## CHAPTER III.

## INTO AN UNKNOWN WORLD.

"Whether by bluff or any other square means," declared Max, "I mean to make a living. If I—a rank outsider—can jump into this job you speak of and make good, I ask nothing better. But it's skilled labor, isn't it? And union labor? How can an outsider understand——"

"I'm not saying you'll make the hit of your life at it," said Floyd; "but if you're handy and if you listen careful to the coaching I'm going to give you, you'll be able to make a bluff at it. And the fact that it's a theater where I've never worked before will help to excuse some of your first bad breaks. After that, it's up to you."

"I like the idea of making good against heavy odds," answered Max. "Tell me what I'll have to know, and I'll take notes. Then, with a little help, and by using my eyes and my wits, I may be able to work into it. There's only one thing I don't like."

"What's that?"

"Sailing under false colors."

"How?"

"Why, won't I have to take your name and use your credentials? In fact, won't I have to assume your identity?"

"Sure. And you might pick out a lot worse man's identity. What's the matter with my name and——"

"Don't get excited," laughed Max. "You don't understand. I only meant that it didn't seem quite square for me to palm myself off as 'Karl Floyd, expert sceneshifter' if——"

"Why not? If you aren't expert enough, you'll be fired. So you won't be robbing the theater. And, as for using my name, why, the only man you'd be defrauding would be me. My name's my own, isn't it? And if I choose to lend it to you, who are you robbing? Besides, I'm thinking of getting a name that fits me better, now that I've come in for a fortune. And then I'll never have any use for my old one any more. How does Reginald De Peyster Montmorency strike you?"

Some class to that, hey? Anyhow, the name 'Karl Floyd' is at your service if you want it. So is the letter and the card."

"Thanks. It's awfully white of you."

"Cut that out. Maybe it wasn't just a wee peckle white of you to sail into that scrap and risk getting a smashed skull just to help a stranger. Now we're going to a little hotel I know about. You'll lodge there with me to-night and breakfast with me in the morning, before you start in to buffalo the stage hands' union."

He called an address to the chauffeur, then continued talking eagerly, as his sort are wont to do when they can find leisure, of what he called the "real" stage life.

"There are a dozen branches of it," said he, "and we stage hands have pretty near the best of it all. The actor has the worst. He's only paid for part of the year at most. He's got to go without salary during rehearsals, and on half pay in Holy Week and Holiday Week. And if the show's a frost, he's liable to be out of work all year."

"If the actor wasn't so vain, or if he had a sense of humor, he'd realize there's more money in bricklaying. But the stage hand and the rest of us who make the wheels go round—we're the lads that draw our full pay all the time the theater's open. The show may be a winner, or it may be a frost. But so long as there's any show at all, we get our pay envelope—stage hands most of all."

"They get twenty-eight dollars a week, you said. Do all of them get the same?"

"No. It varies a bit. But the pay keeps up, 'specially since we got our union. Stage hands' salaries run generally from twenty-five dollars to thirty-five dollars a week. There are about ten of them at the Hyperion. The ushers get the least of any of the theater folks. They only draw from three dollars to four dollars and fifty cents. Yet managers wonder why they're all so crazy to slip a standee into an empty seat and cop his tip."

"Even the call boy gets more'n the



ushers. He runs from five dollars to eight dollars a week. And he gets good fat tips, too. If he doesn't, sometimes he can make it rotten for an actor. The spotlight boy can often shake down the actors, too, for a few tips to swell his weekly ten or twelve. When an actor fails to come across with the tip, something's apt to happen to the spotlight in his next big scene. Not always, of course. But it's been known to."

"Blackmail?" queried Cary.

"No, no. That's an ugly word. Just a willing tip to help a poor lad along. In these combination houses and in vaudeville joints, the orchestra leader gets a good big slice of soft money, too, sometimes. You see, in a legit' play or a dramatic sketch, there isn't much use for the orchestra except now and then to chime in with the 'snaky' incidental music. But in a musical show or in a song-and-dance act, the orchestra leader is just about everything. And he's been known to balk when he ain't greased right. In one vaudeville house, I know of a singing comedienne who hands the orchestra leader twenty-five dollars every week she plays there."

"And," queried Max a little troubled, "do sceneshifters have to take tips, too?"

"Not us," was the indignant answer. "That is—not right out. There's fancy ways, of course, to get your next scene set a little quicker'n the rules require. But——"

"I'd thrash the first man who dared offer me one," growled Max.

"Wait till it's offered you," was the retort. "The electricians are about the only men, so far as I've known, who never seem to get theirs. They run from twelve dollars to thirty-five dollars a week, and nothing on the side. The doorkeeper can always improve on his weekly fifteen dollars if he really wants to. The wardrobe woman gets twelve or fifteen dollars, and she can reap a real harvest if she likes. When costumes have got to be altered or mended in a rush, there's nothing that makes a needle so spry as the rub with a dollar bill.

"But all this is just stage talk. Here

we are at the hotel. After we've had a bite to eat, I'll get busy coaching you on your own work and on the terms they use back of the curtain. If you take good notes, you'll pick up enough so as not to be kicked out the first day."

## CHAPTER IV.

### A NOISY REHEARSAL.

It was a little after nine the next morning when Max Cary was halted at a heavy green stage door in a side street by an elderly, gnarled-faced man in disreputable clothes and with the manner of a sulky czar.

"Whatcher want?" growled the stage-door keeper. "We ain't usin' supes for this week's show. An' if you're an actor, you're fined for being twelve minutes late."

Max fished out his card and letter. The other scanned both with glum scrutiny; then handed them back, and grudgingly gave place.

"Go on in," he said, with the manner of a watchman granting thieves a reluctant access to the bank vaults. "You'll find Speyer, our boss stage carpenter, somewhere back there."

Not daring to risk exposure of his ignorance by asking for more definite directions, Max entered the tunnellike dark passageway, stone flagged and walled in dull-green brick.

After an interminable walk in the almost total darkness, he rounded a corner and came out into a vast space that at first glance presented the appearance of a huge, empty, unlighted barn.

To Max's left arose a red-brick wall, stretching upward until it was lost in a maze of spars and canvas rolls and a tangle of ropes.

He was standing on an immense, slightly sloping floor. This floor continued for some distance to the right, then ended abruptly in a widely crescent-shaped precipice, beyond which stretched the dim vista of an auditorium, its floors rising gradually into rank after rank of linen-draped chairs.

Long, white sheets festooned the proscenium boxes on each side. A musty atmosphere, close yet chilly, per-



vaded the whole place. And this was the "fairyland" of which stage-struck youths dream. At the stage center, three or four men and women were huddled. They were in street dress. The men wore hats, and their coat collars were turned up. The women were equally muffled.

One man caught hold of a woman's hand as Max entered, and said in fervent ardor:

"Then can I never hope to change your verdict?"

At the words, a slender, thin-faced man who stood gloomily beside the footlights was galvanized into sudden, frenzied life. He fairly hopped up and down in rage.

"Not a bit like it!" he howled. "Not a bit! You sound as if you were coaching the man on second! That's the way it went last night, and that's one of the reasons I called a rehearsal for this scene to-day. You don't want to grab her hand as if it was a glass of beer on a hot day. Once more, now."

Again the luckless actor repeated the line. And again the thin stage manager roared his disapproval.

"You ought to be driving a truck!" he stormed. "Here! Try it like *this*."

He caught the actress' long-suffering hand in his, with a tender eagerness, oddly at variance with his recent domineering manner, and began wistfully:

"Then can I never hope to change your——"

Bang! Bang! Bang!

A shirt-sleeved carpenter in the "wings" was hammering a rustic arbor to the trunk of a stage tree. His hammer blows reëchoed deafeningly through the theater, quite drowning out any mere voice.

"Quit that!" roared the stage manager. "Quit it, I say!"

The carpenter glanced up unconcernedly, met that wrathful gaze before which the boldest actors always quailed, and calmly went on with his hammering.

The stage manager glowered in speechless fury. One overbold actor snickered. Max wondered that the magnate whose wrath the foremost ac-

tor so evidently dreaded should be no more potent in dealing with a mere workingman.

The carpenter ceased to hammer, and turned the arbor around at a new angle. The stage manager took advantage of the momentary lull to go on with the rehearsal.

"Once more!" he commanded, again taking the actress' limp hand. "*Then can I never——*"

Bang! Tap-tap-tap! Bang!

The carpenter, having adjusted his arbor, recommenced a merry tattoo with his hammer.

"Say!" screamed the stage manager. "Am I going to get this rehearsal through or not? What do you mean by breaking us up that way? Quit that infernal racket!"

"Meaning me?" asked the carpenter.

"Yes, you! Stop that hammering, or take your work somewhere else."

"How long have you been my boss?" grinned the carpenter, preparing to hammer once more.

"If I was your boss," raged the stage manager, "I'd kick you out of here. Gee, but you'll sing a different tune when you want me to help at the Stage Carpenters' Benefit next month!"

"Oh, there's other benefit performers besides you," observed the carpenter airily. "You ain't the only lemon on the tree."

And he went on with his clamorous task. The stage manager scowled impotently about him in search of some safe object for his rage. His roving eye fell on Max Cary.

"Hey, you!" he bawled threateningly, "what in blazes are you doing here? This isn't a public thoroughfare. Stop gawping, and hustle out of here before I throw you out!"

## CHAPTER V.

### MAX MAKES HIS BLUFF.

Max, ten minutes earlier, might have been annoyed by so fierce a rebuke. But he had ocular proof to back up Floyd's statement that the mechanical force of a theater has little to fear from mere actors. So he answered carelessly:



"I belong here. I've just been hired as a stage hand. I'm looking for Mr. Speyer."

A stout man, who was directing a knot of workers in a far corner of the stage, turned at mention of this name.

"I'm Speyer," he called across. "But if you're a process server, I've got eight husky men here to throw you out."

Max crossed over to the stout man, and handed him the card and letter.

"This is a pleasant welcome I'm getting in my new job," observed Cary. "The stage-door keeper tried to turn me away. The stage manager ordered me out, and now you threaten to set eight men at me. This is surely a cordial crowd."

"H'm!" commented Speyer. "You're a funny feller, hey? We don't care for that breed around here. It's sad enough to listen to the stage comedians every night without having any one to do it free."

"When do I start work?" asked Max, fighting back a yearning to retort in kind.

"Right now," was the reply. "Get off your coat and vest and collar, and pitch in. Hey, there!" he called to the stage manager and the actors. "Move down front for your rehearsal. I want this stage. The second act 'set' went up too slow last night. We're going to practice on it till we cut five minutes off the time. Now, then."

This last was addressed to a group of men in sweaters or shirt sleeves. At their boss' word they suddenly became electrified into life.

They threw themselves bodily upon a mass of variously shaped canvas walls that were stretched upon wooden frames, and on whose backs were scrawled in lampblack the words: "Soldier's Bride, 2d Act."

Max, profiting by his careful study of Floyd's lecture on the subject, plunged into the turmoil in a way which, if not especially effective, was at least inconspicuous, and bore no outer signs of inexperience.

Speyer lifted his head, and shouted something, apparently to the skies

above. On the instant there was a slithering sound. Something swished rapidly downward, blotting out the brick rear wall, and transforming that dingy space into a vista of mountains or summer sea.

So swiftly was the seeming miracle performed that Max had to recall Floyd's teachings a second time before he realized that he had merely seen the descent of a "back drop."

He had no scope for wonder, for the men around him were hauling the canvas walls hither and thither in seeming confusion that nevertheless contained a precise orderliness.

From a shapeless huddle of garishly painted screens and blanks, they were building up, in a few moves, a pretty and artistic garden scene. There was something fascinating in the sight of this quick creation of a picture where, just now, all had been blank walls, dust, and gloom.

"That's a trifle better," admitted Speyer, consulting his watch as the men paused, panting and perspiring, from their feat. "But we've still got to knock one more minute off it. Hey, you butter-fingered carpenter, ain't that arbor most ready? You've been banging away at it for an hour."

"When are you going to finish slapping these scenes around?" snarled the stage manager. "How do you suppose I can rehearse these people when they've got to sidestep a tree every three seconds."

"Oh, go rehearse in the cellar," retorted Speyer crossly. "I told you I wanted the stage. Carpenter, how about that arbor? Floyd, go frisk it over here."

The arbor, whose hammering creation had caused so much annoyance to the stage manager, was at last set in place.

Speyer glanced about him as Napoleon might have done at the crucial moment of Austerlitz. Then, watch in hand, he cried:

"Strike!"

The men, who had waited tensely for the word—which is a technical signal for removing a scene and stripping the



stage—hurled themselves at the task of demolishing the carefully arranged scene, with a vigor that seemed likely to tear the canvas to shreds.

"Hey, you, Floyd!" called Speyer. "Where are your sneakers?"

Max noted for the first time that his fellow workers all wore soft canvas shoes that rendered their footsteps soundless on the bare boards. And he remembered now that such shoes had been an item of instant purchase suggested to him by Floyd.

"Don't show up for the *matinée* without 'em," ordered Speyer. "If we all wore shoes like yours, we'd sound like the charge of the Light Brigade."

Max grew to dislike Speyer more and more as the morning advanced. He had never before known the experience of being ordered about and howled at. And being uncalled, it jarred upon his every sensibility.

When the morning's work was over, there was scant time for a hasty noon meal before the stage was set for the first act of the Wednesday *matinée* performance.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE WARDROBE "WOMAN."

The Hyperion was what is known as a combination house; that is, a theater where "road attractions" appear successively for one-week runs. This means a new company and a new lot of scenery each week, as well as a new weekly change of bill. The life of a stage hand in such a theater is not all roses.

To Max there was something fascinating, yet disillusioning, in this first glimpse of mimic life "back of the stage." On the big, empty stage several squares of scenery would be placed, forming a box, whose only openings were a door or two and the side which faced the footlights.

A group of actors would be loafing in the wings, chatting. Suddenly one of them would stroll wearily toward the canvas-inclosed box. As he entered it, his whole demeanor would change, and he faced the audience as a roaring

comedian, a tense "heavy," or a debonair leading man.

He would go through some stirring scene, make a dramatic exit, then slouch over to the spot in the wings where he had been standing, and resume his interrupted chat.

When the curtain fell, the sound of applause came through to the rear like the rat-tat-tat of numberless pebbles against a windowpane. The stage manager would gauge this applause as a doctor takes a pulse, and always knew whether to signal the curtain to rise, to order the actor to reappear before the footlights, or to have the auditorium lights switched on for the *entr'acte*.

From the auditorium it all seemed vividly real. From the wings it was as flashily unnatural as a marionette show. The combined atmosphere of hustling and of bored weariness that pervaded the stage folks' side of the lowered curtain struck Max as almost tragic.

But the newcomer had scant chance to philosophize. His afternoon was one of endless hurry, of a bewildered effort not to make a mistake so glaringly as to expose his utter lack of experience. Once or twice he narrowly escaped such exposure.

But Floyd's lesson, his own quick wit, and the friendly hand of luck combined to save him.

The *matinée* was ended. The stage was cleared, the house darkened. Max for the first time was able to draw a long breath. All at once he realized that his muscles ached from unwonted exertion, that he was tired out, and that he was dirty.

He stood, a little apart from the rest, gloomily eying a long, jagged rent in his coat, caused by an outjutting nail as he had run between two of the piled-up "sets."

There is supposed to be something rather funny in the fact of a man's coat being torn. But to Max Cary the situation was hopelessly devoid of humor. It was his only coat. He was ignorant, as is the average man, of the art of mending. He could not afford to take the torn garment to a tailor.

The call boy slouched past, whistling.



Catching sight of the coat, he observed airily:

"Hello! Another job for Claire! Lucky for you roustabouts that she's good-natured. I've worked in a lot of houses where a wardrobe woman wouldn't do a stitch of sewing except for the company. They ain't s'posed to, either."

Max saw light ahead. The problem of the coat promised to be solved.

"I'm new on the job to-day," said he; "and I don't know where the wardrobe room in this house is. Will you show me?"

"I s'pose so," grunted the call boy. "I oughter be at supper right now. And it ain't my job to run a seein'-the-Hyperion wagon for one of you roustabouts. But I'm so dead easy by nature that I'd almost give a guy a nickel to save him from starving. Come along."

He led the way, past the iron spiral stairway that wound upward to the tiers of dressing rooms, to a low-ceiled cubbylike apartment at one end of the stage-door passage.

Flinging open the door of this room, without knocking, the call boy ushered Max in, announcing grandiloquently:

"Miss Claire Dean, here is Sir Guy De Tanglefeet. He's tore his Sunday armor, an' wants you to rivet it up for him. Shake hands with Tanglefeet."

The boy departed, slamming the door behind him, leaving Max standing confusedly in the center of the room.

The apartment was whitewashed. Rows of carefully arranged clothes hung on supports along two sides of the wall, protected by double sheets. A sewing machine, a work-littered table, and two chairs completed the furnishings. Three gas jets, protected by iron wire globes, flared above the table.

At the sewing machine sat a girl. Her face, though tired and a trifle pale, was softly oval, and was crowned by a mass of shimmering brown hair. Her gray eyes were as fearless and direct as a child's.

Max had always imagined that wardrobe women must necessarily be fat, frowsy, and middle-aged. This mere

slip of a girl seemed somehow "out of the picture."

She surveyed him in friendly, pleasant fashion. There is an easy good-fellowship and equality about the theater that dispenses with useless formalities. Noting Max Cary's shyness, she sought to put him at his ease.

"Well, Sir Knight," said she, "what can I do for you?"

"My—my coat is torn," he answered. "And I was told——"

"That Claire Dean would be glad to mend it? So I will. Take it off, please. What a huge tear! How did you do it?"

"On a nail. While we were shifting the scenes for the second act. I——"

"You wore a coat while you were at work? How foolish! You might have known——"

"I did. But there were several actresses standing near where I was at work. So I put on my coat."

"Because there were women present? I rather like that. But it isn't like anything I ever heard of in a theater. Is that why you are hesitating about taking it off now? Please don't be foolish. I can't mend it on you. This isn't a drawing-room."

"I know," he answered; "but is that any reason for not treating women as if it were?"

She glanced up at him quickly.

"I think I like you, Sir Knight," she said softly. "By the way," she added in a more businesslike tone, "what is your name?"

"Karl Floyd," he replied.

She started to her feet involuntarily, staring at him in utter, incredulous amaze. "Karl Floyd!" she repeated. "Are you joking?"

## CHAPTER VII.

### AN OFFER OF HELP.

"Joking?" Max echoed. "Why do you ask?"

But his heart sank. The name Karl Floyd evidently meant something to Claire Dean. Just what, he could not guess. But he feared that his bluff was in danger.



If this girl really knew Karl Floyd, all sorts of complications might ensue. Max might find himself penniless on the New York streets again.

Yet he resolved to bluff out the situation as long as possible.

"The name seems familiar to you," he commented, trying to steady his voice into assumed carelessness.

As he spoke, he drew forth the envelope containing his union card and the letter of engagement, and handed them to her.

She read both slowly, carefully. Then she raised her eyes to his, and looked at him long with an inscrutable gaze.

At last she returned the card and letter to their envelope, and handed them back to him.

"The name did have a familiar sound," she said quietly. "Perhaps I have heard it before—somewhere. It is rather unusual, I think."

Her calm dismissal of the subject was at wide variance with the startled look that had greeted his first mention to her of his new name. And this vaguely puzzled him.

But before he could analyze the matter or frame a more searching query, she went on as if in total irrelevancy:

"You say you are a new man at the Hyperion?"

"Yes."

"Each theater has ways and customs and a routine of its own, different from all the others. Of course you know that. You've discovered, too, that Mr. Speyer doesn't like to be bothered with questions. So, if there is ever anything about the place or about your work that puzzles you or that seems to need explaining, I'll be very glad indeed to be of use to you. I've been here a year now, and I know the place pretty well."

Again something in her tone and in the nature of her offer struck him as odd. And again he could not quite grasp the elusive subtlety. He took refuge in gratitude.

"Thank you ever so much," said he. "It's awfully good of you to volunteer to help a total stranger."

She glanced up from her work.

"Are we total strangers?" she asked.

"Aren't we?"

"I—I wondered if perhaps we had met before, somewhere," she said evasively. "—You're quite sure we haven't?"

"Perfectly sure," he said. "I should have remembered you—anywhere and for any length of time."

"I do not care for compliments," she reproved him rather stiffly.

"Neither do I," he agreed, with perfect assurance. "I never pay them."

His eyes were sincere under her sharply inquiring glance, and showed no hint of flattery. She flushed a little as she looked away, but seemed not wholly ill pleased.

"You say you've been here a year?" he resumed. "You don't look as I imagined wardrobe women would."

"As you imagined?" she echoed. "Surely you must have seen hundreds of them?"

It was on the top of Cary's tongue to ruin everything by declaring he had never before seen one. But he changed, barely in time, his answer:

"I never saw one—as young as you. They are usually middle-aged."

"I know," she assented, to his infinite relief. "But there's no reason why a girl should not get the position. I was left without any money when my parents died. I had learned to sew rather well, and I thought of becoming a dressmaker. But it is hard to make a living that way if one has had no experience and has collected no customers."

"So you chose this position instead?"

"Yes; or, rather, it was chosen for me. A chum of my brother was a theatrical man. He got me the place of wardrobe woman at the Apollo Theater. When that closed, six months later, I came here."

"It must be a hard life for a young girl."

"All life is as hard or as easy as we make it, I think. The work is heavy sometimes. But the people here are nice to me—nearly all of them."

There was an inflection in her voice

as she said the last words that roused his curiosity.

"You mean," he said, "that some of the people are not?"

"Oh, one can't have everything just exactly as one wants it all the time," she evaded. "And some people are unpleasant because they can't help it. I don't mind—much."

"I wish I could help you," he said gravely. "Will you think me impertinent if I ask leave to be of use in case any one is unpleasant to you while I am employed here?"

"You are good to offer it," she said; "and you are not 'impertinent.' But please don't ever do anything of the sort. I can take care of myself very well. If you interfered, you would only be discharged. And I don't think you would like that. For you must value your new position or——"

"I value it to just this extent," said Max. "It is the only thing just at present that stands between me and starvation. That's why I'm here. It isn't pleasant to starve. But," he added, "it would be a lot less pleasant to value my job so highly that I would stand by and see any woman ill-treated. That is why I ask leave——"

The door opened, and Speyer's big body blocked the threshold.

"Hello, Claire," he called familiarly. "I just dropped in for a little chat. Busy?"

Max saw the girl's dainty brows contract with displeasure at sight of the burly newcomer. The latter's free-and-easy manner evidently offended her.

Before she could reply to the coarse-voiced greeting, Speyer caught sight of Max.

"What in blazes are you sneaking in here for?" he blurted.

"Mr. Floyd came to get me to sew his torn coat," intervened Claire quietly. "It is all finished now, Mr. Floyd," she added, handing him the garment.

"Thank you ever so much, Miss Dean," said Max. "It was very kind of you, and——"

"And," cut in Speyer, "in future keep out of here! Understand that? I'm

not going to have you stage hands running to Claire every time your clothes get torn. And I won't have you make it an excuse to hang around here chinning with her, either. Now chase back to your work before I kick you back to it."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### TO THE RESCUE.

Max Cary's face went scarlet. Every sinew in his muscular young body throbbed with wild, unreasoning rage at the brutal insult.

Never in all his short life had he fought so hard a battle as now he waged to keep from flying at the man who had humiliated him by speaking to him thus in a woman's presence.

But sanity came to his aid. An altercation with the boss scenshifter would mean his own immediate discharge. He had no right to gratify his hurt self-esteem.

Choking back a hot retort, he turned to leave the room.

Speyer, glorying in the chance to bully a shorter, slighter man, and to enhance his own importance in Claire's eyes, shouted at him again.

"Dick Speyer," interposed the girl, her pale cheeks crimson with angry sympathy at Max's undeserved humiliation, "you may browbeat your men to your brutal heart's content during work hours and in your own territory. But neither you nor any one else except the manager of this theater has the right to say who shall or shall not come into this room. If Mr. Floyd lets you speak so, it is because he has too much courage to be moved by a bully's threats. Mr. Floyd, I shall be glad to see you whenever you care to come here and will——"

"H'm!" snarled Speyer, his thick lips curling back from his teeth like a cross dog's. "Stuck on him, hey? After turning me down, and refusing to waste a mouthful of civil words on me, you give the soft talk to a green roustabout? Gee! You cheap theater women are all alike. I——"

He got no further. Max had crossed



the narrow, intervening space at one stride. And as he came he struck.

The blow caught Speyer full on the mouth. And it caught him totally unprepared. Beneath its quick impact his head jerked backward and struck against the wall with a bang. Only the wall at his back saved him from a fall.

With a roar of anger—dazed but furious—he gathered himself for a rush at Max. For usually it is only in story-books that the bully is a coward and can be tamed by one well-directed punch.

But Claire Dean leaped between the two men.

"Stop it!" she commanded, her imperious young voice filling the room like the call of a silver trumpet. "Stop it, I say!"

She stood full between them—unafraid, scornful.

"Leave this room, both of you!" she ordered. "And don't either of you speak to me again until you can apologize. How dare you?"

"I cannot apologize," said Max. "This cur insulted you. I would have been as contemptible as he, if I had not punished him."

The girl turned on Cary, a strange, puzzled look in her flashing eyes.

"You—you struck him because he spoke that way to me?" she asked in genuine wonder.

"Of course. Why else?"

"Not because he insulted you?"

"I don't settle my private quarrels in the presence of women," Max returned coldly.

"Oh, forgive me!" she cried in quick penitence. "I didn't understand. Really I didn't. I'm so sorry. It never occurred to me that a man could resent a slight to me. I——"

"I can scarcely wonder," observed Max, "since you have been forced of late to associate with people of this man's type."

Speyer, who had been sputtering profane incoherencies, now found audible voice.

"That'll be all!" he burst forth. "Claire, you were dead right not to let us scrap here. I'd probably have gone

to jail for killing him. There's a quicker way of settling such guys. Floyd, you're fired. Get out of here. If you're in this theater in five minutes, I'll have you run in for trespass. Clear out!"

Max shrugged his shoulders, taking his dismissal with as good a grace as might be. It sickened him to think that his own folly had robbed him so soon of his one chance of a livelihood.

Yet, even in that moment of despair, he realized that if the thing were to be done over again, he would do it. He turned to leave the room. But Claire once more intervened.

"Wait, please," she begged him.

Then, wheeling upon Speyer, she said quietly:

"Dick, the manager of this theater told me when I came here that if any man ever spoke a brutal word to me he should be discharged. You know as well as I do how hard he tries to guard the women here from ill treatment.

"If I go to him and repeat what you said a few minutes ago—and call Mr. Floyd as witness, what do you suppose will happen to you? If I tell him also that you once swore at me and that at another time you tried to kiss me—do you suppose you will hold your job another hour? And from the influence our manager has at other theaters, do you think you'd get another job soon? Now, think it over, and decide if Mr. Floyd is to be discharged."

Speyer glowered in silent, impotent wrath from one to the other. Then, slouching out of the room, he growled:

"He can stay."

"You conquered him?" said Claire, smiling sadly. "You don't know Dick Speyer. Look out for him. I'm afraid I have got you into worse trouble than if I had let him discharge you."

## CHAPTER IX.

### A CALL TO BATTLE.

The evening performance was over. The curtain had been raised for the night. The auditorium seats had been shrouded, the boxes covered by their long sheets that fell from roof to floor. The actors had gone.

Max Cary was about to start down the brick-walled passageway toward the street when the call boy stopped him. There was a subdued excitement in the lad's manner as he informed Cary that Speyer wanted to see him at once on the stage.

Wondering what new duty could summon him so late at night, Max turned back. On the center of the stage, his men and a few other theater employees about him, stood Speyer.

"Look here, you!" was Speyer's greeting, as Max drew near; "you hit me to-day. And you did it when I couldn't hit back. You know why. I could fire you for that. But I don't believe in letting private grudges interfere with a man's job."

A murmur of obsequious approval from his underlings greeted this noble speech.

"You are very wise to decide it that way," agreed Max airily.

His reply, incomprehensible to the others, brought a dull flush to Speyer's florid face.

The big man went on:

"We have a better way here of settling these rows. We settle them with our fists. It keeps men from going on having a grouch at each other and hurting their own work. Will you fight me, or are you a dirty coward who's afraid to put up his dukes?"

"I'll fight you," said Max coolly.

The big man grinned. Max saw at once the trap that had been set. Speyer was a half head taller than himself and some forty pounds heavier. The man doubtless had some local fame as a rough-and-tumble fighter. He was evidently not enough a judge of physiques to read the wiry strength that lay in Cary's rather slender figure.

Speyer doubtless counted on thrashing into insensibility the man he feared to discharge, perhaps to injure him to such an extent that Max would be unable to work for months to come.

It looked to Speyer like an easy and safe revenge, and one likely to strengthen his prestige over his men. The trap was very plainly in sight. But Max—skilled athlete and true judge of physi-

cal excellence or defect—was in no way cast down.

"Good!" grunted Speyer. "There couldn't be a better time or place. The manager's gone home. So has everybody but these lads here. And none of them will be yellow enough to tell. Get busy everybody."

Two stage hands proceeded to divest Speyer of his coat and waistcoat. An electrician's assistant and the call boy volunteered as seconds for Max.

As the fighters were stripping for the fray, the call boy whispered to Max:

"Now's your time to beat it, friend. Speyer's licked a dozen stage hands in the past six months. He's a reg'lar bruiser. He's knocked the block off bigger, huskier chaps than you are. There's the passageway. Take it on the run."

"Thanks," answered Max, "but I need the job. If I run away, I'll never be able to come back."

"I guess that's what Dick's counting on," returned the lad. "He don't seem to love you so very much. I dunno why. An' when Dick don't like a man, it's safer for that man to get out o' here. For, even if a miracle was to happen an' you should lick him——"

"Time!" called a self-appointed watch holder.

Both men, stripped to the waist, moved forward to the center of the improvised ring. The rays of a small "bunch light" cast a dull glow on the stage, revealing the advancing fighters and the excited knot of bystanders.

At first sight, an unknowing outsider would have declared the combatants terribly ill-matched. Speyer, big, burly, savage, seemed the ideal pugilist. Max, slighter, shorter, looked outclassed.

But a man wise in the ways of boxing and of athletic physique would have seen the pair with far different eyes. To such an observer, Speyer would have displayed far too much flesh.

His heavy face would have denoted the gross living that is fatal to wind and endurance. His attitude was that of the ruffian rather than of the expert boxer.



Max, on the other hand, had the unconscious grace and poise that go with perfect knowledge of boxing. He carried not one ounce of loose flesh. His eye was clear, his chest deep. The muscles of arms and body were not knotted like Speyer's, but they had the supple power of a young tiger's.

Endurance, swiftness, and an unexpected strength were his, coupled with the expertness that had won him a championship in college. He had also fully ten years the advantage, in age, over his more formidable-looking opponent.

But stage hands are not necessarily adepts in seizing up physiques. Speyer was their dreaded hero. They had seen him win a score of hotly contested rough-and-tumble fights from men whose skill was no greater than his own and whose ferocious strength was far less. They looked on the result as a foregone conclusion. They scarcely expected a bout of real interest.

## CHAPTER X.

### TO A FINISH.

As the men neared each other, Speyer suddenly lowered his head and rushed, both arms swinging like iron flails. It was the sort of attack to alarm a novice. And, should one of those huge fists reach its mark, it was certain to do mischief.

Max Cary could have laughed aloud. From the nature of the other's assault, he saw how easy his own work was to be.

Sidestepping, he avoided the rush. And, as Speyer whirled about, Max struck him twice, with lightning speed, once on the chin and once over the ear.

Speyer, amazed and angered at the other's ability, "bored in" with right and left, only to find his foe almost always just out of reach, and to receive blow after blow on face and body that jarred his whole huge bulk.

At the end of the first round, Max walked back to his corner, unmarked, save where a chance blow had glanced past his shoulder, raising a red blotch.

Speyer, panting, bleeding, sore, and utterly nonplused by this unwonted form of opponent, sat scowling across at his enemy, while his seconds sponged him down and offered more or less wise advice.

"Gee, but you sure must have eat a speed ball!" commented the call boy admiringly, as he fanned Max with a towel. "You was nowhere at all when he hit, and you was everywhere when it came your time to hit back. Maybe you'll live till to-morrow, after all. But if you do——"

"Time!" called the man with the watch.

Speyer advanced more cautiously this time, waiting craftily for a chance to draw his antagonist into the reach of those great hammer fists.

But Max did not await his coming. He darted forward, apparently running straight into danger; then he halted and checked nimbly as Speyer's fist shot out. Coming up under the blow that barely grazed the top of his head, Cary landed an uppercut flush on the other's jaw. Speyer was coming forward at the time. This doubled the blow's force.

Down went the big man in a heap. There, to the dismay of his followers, he lay, inert, while the referee began to count off the ten fatal seconds.

At the count of "nine," Speyer scrambled awkwardly to his feet, and stood swaying.

"Now's your time!" shouted the call boy in reckless enthusiasm. "Now's your time. You've got him groggy. Go in and finish him."

But Max did not. A man of fine feelings and kindly heart can never hope to make a successful pugilist, for the simple reason that such a man cannot bring himself to adopt pugilism's first principle, namely, to hammer a distressed foe into helplessness.

So it was with Max. Still strong and unwearied, he could not bear to hurl himself upon his dazed, tottering opponent and deliver the blow that would have finished the battle in short order.

Instead, he stepped back, and lowered his arms, as Speyer lurched clumsily forward.

It was a costly mercy that Max showed. For, on the instant, his seemingly helpless enemy straightened up, and swung his right arm forward with terrific force.

Max, his guard down, his anger already turning to pity, received the blow full on the point of his jaw, and dropped on all fours. There, for a moment, he crouched, shivering, then sank slowly down upon his face and chest.

Everything went black around him. He felt a vague desire to slumber, to sink down unresistingly through the soft darkness that enveloped him.

Through the delicious sense of numbness came an irritating sound. The sound of a far-off voice droning out some numbers:

"One—two—three—four!"

Annoyed by the iteration, Max tried to guess what the numbers might stand for.

"Five—six—seven!"

"Why, that is the way they count a man out in a fight!" he mused drowsily. "I wonder——"

"Eight—nine!"

In a flash memory returned to the fallen man. It was he they were "counting out!"

Through the daze mists the knowledge pierced, rousing him to a semblance of life once more.

The referee's lips were parted to call "ten," when Max Cary, with a mighty effort, staggered blindly to his feet.

As the bewildered young man rose from the ground, Speyer charged furiously at him. Down he went again, but this time with a slowly clearing brain.

And at the second count of "nine," he got up, weak and sick, but fully sensible to what was going on. Feebly he ducked the blow that Speyer relied on to finish the fight, and, staggering in, he clinched. Nor would he release his desperate hold on his foe's body until the referee pulled the two apart.

The call of "time" sent him to his corner, still weak. But the hard work of his seconds during the minute of rest did much to revive him. His own clear life, his youth, and his splendid health

did still more to revive him. His scattered forces began slowly to collect.

Nevertheless, for the next two rounds, he contented himself with blocking, stalling, and keeping out of Speyer's reach as best he could.

He let his antagonist do all the work, while he applied himself to getting back into full strength.

The strain was beginning to tell on Speyer. His extra flesh and shortness of wind were doing more to harm him than his opponent.

When they came up for the fifth round, Max suddenly changed his tactics. From moving about warily on the defensive, he suddenly assumed the aggressive.

Avoiding Speyer's awkward rushes, he poured a volley of short-arm blows in upon the heavier man, playing for the other's laboring wind, for the slackening jaw, for every vulnerable spot.

Speyer in vain sought to guard or to retaliate. With a last wild effort, he threw himself bodily at Max.

But Cary was not there. Sidestepping, he drove his left arm out straight and stiff as an iron bar.

Speyer ran into the blow. The big man's knees doubled under him, and he collapsed to the hard floor.

Solemnly, regretfully, the referee counted him out. The great Hyperion Theater fight was over.

Slowly the beaten man revived under the ministrations of his seconds. Stupidly he looked about him until his swollen eye fell upon Max.

"Say, brother!" muttered the call-boy in Max's ear, "I wouldn't have a man give me that look for a hundred plunks. Look out for him! He ain't done with you yet. Why, he ain't even started in on you!"

## CHAPTER XI.

### SPEYER'S NEXT MOVE.

In the few weeks that followed, Max Cary was destined to realize to the full the truth of the call boy's oddly worded warning.

There was no overt act of Speyer's that he could lay hands on, but petty



persecutions were his by the thousand. If there was an especially unpleasant bit of work for any one man to do, Max was assigned to it. If there was overtime duty, heavy lifting, especial drudgery of any sort, his was the lot.

Max bore it uncomplainingly. He worked hard, because he loved to work hard. And he took a savage pleasure in not giving Speyer the satisfaction of seeing he noticed or resented the extra labor.

Speyer, as boss of the stage hands, had suffered not a little in this eclipse of his championship fame at the hands of an outsider. And Max had won correspondingly, from a standpoint of popularity.

With Claire Dean, Max had daily become better acquainted. At odd moments he often dropped in for a word or two in her workroom. They were both, in a sense, different from those about them, and this insensibly drew them together. They were congenial in a thousand ways. And, as the days went on, each unconsciously began to rely more and more upon the other for companionship.

It was the first time Max had ever felt more than a passing interest in any girl. The strange, new sensation puzzled him. He had a feeling of shame that he must pose in false colors before this clear-eyed, gentle girl. He grew to hate the masquerade in which he was taking part, grew to despise himself for living under the name and identity of another man.

Over and over again he told himself he was doing nothing dishonorable in calling himself Karl Floyd, and that he was honestly earning the living he received. But he wished he might confess to Claire the innocent deception.

More than once, indeed, he was on the point of doing so; but something ever seemed to hold him back. He dared not risk the loss of her friendship—a friendship that had gradually grown sweeter to him than anything else in all life.

One evening a little before the performance, Speyer appeared after a half day's absence. Max could see at a

glance that the man had been drinking. And he saw also that Speyer was one of the men on whom liquor has the effect of bringing out all the brute in their nature.

Speyer had made a brief round of the half-set stage. He was evidently now looking for some one. His eye fell on Max, and his drink-flushed face brightened.

"Here, Floyd!" he ordered, pointing upward. "That hook on the top of the first-act copse is wrong. It won't hold the fly rope. Get a ladder, and run up and fix it. Quick!"

Now this was no part of Max's work, and Cary knew it. Nevertheless, he brought out the eighteen-foot stepladder, set it in place alongside the already upright canvas scene, and ran to the top.

"The hook seems all right," he called down, after a brief examination. "See, the rope holds it perfectly."

To illustrate his meaning, he reached out and caught the hanging rope end, with the iron "catch" at its tip, and snapped it to the hook.

The simple movement saved him from death or from becoming a cripple for the rest of his days.

For, as Max spoke, Speyer's foot slipped. The big man plunged forward awkwardly to preserve his balance. His shoulder struck against the stepladder with all the weight of his two hundred pounds.

The ladder shot out from under Max's feet, and fell with a crash to the floor. Max instinctively tightened his hold on the rope which he had just unfastened from the hook.

By one hand he hung thus, over eighteen feet of space. The rope swung outward, and its supports above, not built to withstand so heavy and sudden a strain, creaked ominously.

It is one thing to hang from a gymnasium rope by both hands, or even by a single hand, when one is prepared for the feat. It is quite another to maintain the same position when one has caught a chance hold on a bit of slippery rope no thicker than a clothesline.

The hemp ran through Max's unpre-

pared hand, tearing the skin as it went, and stopped only when the metal catch, bulging out below, gave the hanging man's fingers a tentative grip.

There was a yell of dismay from the stage below.

"Get a mattress!" bawled some one.

Two more jumped for the ladder, and reared it upright again. But, as they tried to set it into position under the man's swinging feet, it collapsed.

One of its uprights had snapped in two when it had fallen to the stage under the force of Speyer's shove. For present practical purposes the ladder was no better than so much match-wood.

Max, glancing downward as he spun helplessly around on the end of the rope, saw the failure of this one hope.

His arm, jerked almost from its socket by the sudden weight that had been thrown upon it, ached intolerably. He had an insane longing to let go, to drop and take his chances.

Yet he knew full well what must be the "chances" of so long a fall to so hard a surface. The lightest, most athletic man could scarcely hope to avoid death or maiming in such a drop.

Max Cary hung on desperately. He knew he could maintain his hold but a few moments longer. And in that instant of hopelessness the quaint, splendid old Scandinavian proverb recurred, oddly enough, to his memory:

*"Heroism consists in keeping on just one minute more."*

He was dizzy from spinning about. His tense arm muscles began to grow numb. A deadly faintness crept over him.

## CHAPTER XII.

### MYSTERIOUS HELP.

Still looking down, Max could distinguish Speyer's face among those upturned toward him. And in the first glance, before the boss stage hand could control his features, Max knew the seeming accident had been no accident at all.

It made him turn cold to believe that any man could deliberately seek the

death or permanent crippling of another. Yet the fact fitted in well with stories he had heard of Speyer's character. The man was a brute. And Max had humbled him in the presence of all his subordinates.

Max knew that Speyer could not be held legally responsible for the act. He could say it had been a mischance, and none could disprove his claim.

And, now all at once, Cary was aware of an odd sensation in his eyes. When first he had looked downward, Speyer and the rest had been far below him. Now they seemed perceptibly nearer.

As he gazed, dumfounded, they drew nearer yet. And at the same moment a cheer broke from some of them.

He saw the upturned faces—all but Dick Speyer's—change in expression from horror to relief. And they came still nearer to him, as they changed.

He was too faint, too far gone, to feel amazement at this impossible phenomenon. That the whole stage floor, and those who stood thereon, should be gently rising to meet him, did not seem at all strange.

But he wished it would rise faster; for he was very weary. And he dully wondered if he might not gain time by letting go and dropping to meet the too slowly rising floor.

Then he remembered that for some forgotten reason he had resolved not to let go. And, half annoyed at his own obstinacy, he kept his stiff fingers and whirling brain true to their purpose.

Then something brushed against his dangling foot. It was a man's shoulder. And, almost simultaneously, several hands seized his body. Then he went to sleep.

He was roused by a tugging at his hand. He involuntarily tightened his hold on the rope end. He heard a voice say half admiringly:

"He won't let go the thing even now. He's got grit, all right."

"He's coming around," said some one else. "Stand back a bit, boys, and give him air."

Max opened his eyes, and stared heavily at the men about him.

"How—how did you fellows ever get



up here?" he asked thickly. "Aren't you afraid of falling?"

A chuckle greeted his half-audible words. The sound made him unreasonably cross. And the little gust of temper served to drive the cobwebs from his brain.

Feebly he rose to a sitting position. He found himself on the floor of the stage, the rope end clutched in his hand, the knuckles of which were white with strain.

He tried to open his fingers. But he could not. The cramped, bound muscles utterly refused to obey his will. With his other hand, heedless of questions and congratulations of the bystanders, he solemnly proceeded to pry open finger after finger until the rope fell free from his grasp.

Then he noted for the first time that the rope end, which ordinarily hung a full eighteen feet in air, dangled on the stage. He could not understand.

Two of the men were gently lifting him to his feet.

"If you're all over throwing fits," growled Speyer, "get to work, and let the rest of the crowd get to work. We've barely time to get the stage set, as it is, without stopping because one man happens to be baby enough to faint."

Max turned on him, still dizzy, but hot with anger.

"A man that faints," he said, "will get over it. But a man who is cur enough to try to kill another in cold blood will never get over that."

"Whatcher talking about?" blustered Speyer. "D'ye mean to hint that I done that a-purpose?"

"I don't hint anything," answered Max steadily. "I know you did it."

"You're—you're clean crazy!" stammered the other. "You make me laugh, talking such rot as that. Come on, boys! Get to work. We're late. And the feller that dares say I knocked away that ladder on purpose, will have to take a licking from me if I hear of it."

"I say it," retorted Max.

"You?" sneered Speyer. "You don't count; you're sore on me because——"

"Because I thrashed you the first night I came here," finished Cary.

A titter from one or two of the men caused Speyer to glare about the circle of faces like a baited bull. Then, muttering savagely and incoherently to himself, the boss stamped away to his work, leaving the others to follow as they might.

"Close shave, Karl, my son," commented the call boy, as Max started off with the rest; "I told you he'd try to get back at you. And he sure did. All the crowd knows it, only they're too scared, for their jobs, to let on. I know Dick Speyer. Put a little booze in him, an' there's nothing he won't do. The assistant manager we had here last season tried to get him fired. Next night one of the sandbag scene weights dropped by accident out of the flies as the assistant manager was walking under. It got him, too—pretty near croaked him. Just as you'll get yours, if you're nice and patient."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### NEWS FROM THE ROAD.

Three evenings later, as the stage had been cleared at the end of the performance and Max was about to leave for the night, he dropped in, as was his custom, at Claire Dean's workroom.

He usually walked home with her now, when work was over. Sometimes they even celebrated by stopping at a near-by all-night dairy lunch room for an oyster stew or griddle cakes.

To-night, getting no response to his rap, he pushed wide the half-open door. Claire had not heard him. She was standing beside the worktable, adjusting bandages to her hands.

A quick glance as he entered showed Max that both her palms were red and scarred. The next second she had seen him, and whipped both hands behind her back.

"What is it?" he asked, in quick sympathy. "How did you hurt your hands? Was that why you've been working in fingerless gloves for the past few days?"

I thought it was to keep your hands white. What is it, Claire?"

"I—I happened to cut my palms just a little," she answered confusedly. "They're much better. Please don't talk about it."

"Happened to cut them?" he repeated, in amazement. "How?"

"By—an accident. Please don't——"

"Tell me," he urged.

But she would not, no matter how hard he begged. Suddenly a thought struck him. He glanced down at one of his own hands—a hand whose palm was still raw.

"Claire," he said excitedly, "do you see my hand? It got cut that way when the rope ran along my palm the night I caught hold of it to keep from falling to the stage. It's the same sort of mark that I see on your hands."

"Well, what then? Oh, let's talk of something else."

"Wait! I made inquiries and found out how I was saved from a fall that night. It seems that while the rest were all staring up at me, somebody ran to the back, found which of the ropes I was hanging from, unwound the other end of it, and played it out slowly through the pulley block, until I was let down to the stage."

"But——"

"For a strong man it would have been a comparatively easy feat, for the block took off much of the strain." But—if some fragile girl had tried it, the rope would have cut her hands cruelly."

"Please don't! I——"

"I have looked ever since for the person whose cool head and pluck saved my life. None of the men knew who it was. But now I know. And with all my heart I thank you, Claire——"

"Oh!" she answered, in pretty confusion. "I'm so sorry you found out. I hate to have people feel under obligation to me. And there's nothing to feel obligations for. Really, there isn't."

"There is everything."

"No; I happened to be coming out of here when I heard the ladder fall. I looked across, and saw what had happened. I saw the ladder was broken,

too. I was nearer the line of rope pulleys than any of the others were. I was afraid the rope might break or your strength give out if I waited to remind the others to lower you. They all seemed to have lost their heads. And no one thought of the rope. It was a very simple thing."

"It was a very splendid thing," he declared, "for a very worthless man. I cannot thank you as I should."

"Don't try to. I'd have done the same thing for any of the men."

"As willingly?" he asked.

She did not answer. He drew a step nearer to her, his heart pounding strangely.

"As willingly?" he repeated.

She turned away her face, but made no answer.

"Claire!" he exclaimed, swept away by a rush of longing. "Claire, I——"

"Excuse me for butting in," drawled a sneering voice from the doorway.

The two wheeled about guiltily to face Dick Speyer, whose big body blocked the threshold. His heavy face was spread in a grin of joyful malice. In his hand he held a newspaper.

"Excuse me for butting in," he repeated; "but I've just run across a bit of news that may be of a heap of interest to you two young folks; specially to you, Claire. It's from one of the marked newspapers the press agent of next week's show sent on ahead."

He unfolded the sheet, and glanced down at a passage he had underscored.

"This is an Altoona paper," he said. "The Bromley Opera Company that's due at the Hyperion next Monday is playing there this week. Their press agent's got in a little puff about their soubrette. Listen to this."

He read slowly and with gleeful emphasis the following item:

"Miss Pansy Clermont, whose picture is here printed, is the talented soubrette of the Bromley Opera Company, now appearing at Gurling's Theater. In private life Miss Clermont is Mrs. Karl Floyd, wife of a scene-shifter at the Hyperion Theater, New York."



## CHAPTER XIV.

## MISSING FIRE.

Speyer paused in his reading of the newspaper clipping, and looked up at Claire, a triumphant leer on his face. But neither she nor Max spoke, and Speyer, with evil zest, resumed his reading:

"When the company arrives at the Hyperion Theater next week, Miss Clermont and her husband will meet for the first time in six months. The young couple are devoted to each other. But exigencies of the profession and the great road success of the Bromley Company have kept them apart for half a year. Miss Clermont says she will——"

"If you are reading that with the idea of interesting me, Dick," said Claire, without a trace of emotion in her voice, "you needn't go on. It doesn't interest me in the very least."

Max, mouth and eyes wide open, had listened speechless, dumfounded, to the reading. He felt as though he were walking through an impossible nightmare.

It is probably a peculiar sensation for any single man to read a newspaper article about his own wife; doubly so, if he is on the verge of asking another girl to marry him.

Then, as the blank amaze subsided, Max began to understand. This Clermont woman was, in all probability, Karl Floyd's wife. Floyd had mentioned to Cary that he was married, but there had been no special reason why he should. He could not have foreseen that his wife's company would appear at the Hyperion.

The woman herself had doubtless heard from Floyd, in Chicago, that he expected to take a position as stage hand at the Hyperion, and had furnished her press agent with this choice bit of intelligence. But the fact that she was evidently ignorant of her husband's sudden rise in fortune led Max to doubt the printed statement of the couple's devotion.

And now he, Max Cary, was to be confronted by a supposititious wife—a

woman who at first glimpse of himself would denounce him as an impostor.

This certainly troubled him far less than the knowledge that Claire Dean must even now be regarding him as the lowest of blackguards; that her warm friendship for him must have changed, in a breath, to utter scorn; that the love he had half hoped he had awakened within her was now turned to loathing.

He quite understood Speyer's motive for hastening to them with the miserable story. Truly, the big sceneshifter was having a complete and ideal revenge upon the man who had bested him in love and in battle—a revenge far keener than the mere death or crippling of that same rival.

Speyer stood, grinning from one to the other. Max did not dare meet Claire's gaze. But he faced Speyer without so much as the quiver of an eyelash.

"Is that all?" he asked quietly.

"Yes," chuckled Speyer. "I guess that's about all you care to hear, or I need to read. You're a sweet, young saint, you are—always cutting out bad language and refusing to drink, and always lifting your hat when you meet a woman, and treating them as if they were all duchesses; and all the time you——"

"Dick," put in Claire very quietly, "I asked you one evening a few weeks ago to leave this room, and to keep out of it in future. If you don't go, and if you don't stay away, I shall complain to the manager."

"Oh, all right," assented Speyer; "I'll get out. I butted in on something that looked like it was going to be a pretty little love scene. I guess it won't be continued when I'm gone. I've shifted the scenes a bit too violent for that. So long."

He slouched out.

Max, still fearing to look at Claire, followed close on his enemy's heels. He was not lacking in courage; yet, to save his life, he could not have summoned pluck to meet the look he knew must be stamped on Claire Dean's face.

## CHAPTER XV.

## FATE TAKES A HAND.

The next day was Sunday. Max was morbidly glad of the chance to avoid meeting Claire. He went around to the little hotel where Karl Floyd had taken him on the night the two men had met. He was resolved to drag Floyd around to the Hyperion next day, by force if necessary, and make him clear up the situation. But, to his chagrin, he learned that Floyd was not at the hotel; nor had he been there in nearly a month.

"I remember him well," laughed the desk clerk. "He talked as if he was Rockefeller and Morgan rolled into one. Said one day that a man of his means ought to live at a sweller hotel. So he had his trunk taken around to the Mammoth."

At the latter hotel Floyd's name appeared on the register, but some time before he had departed, leaving no address. There all clues ceased.

Max was in a bitter quandary. Prudence and common sense alike warned him not to return to the Hyperion. Floyd's wife was certain to denounce him on sight as an impostor, and he would assuredly be discharged. Indeed, he would be lucky if he was not sent to jail.

Claire, too, would see how he had deceived her as to his identity. Speyer would openly rejoice over his downfall. On the whole, there was every reason why he should not go to the theater, and no earthly reason why he should. He had saved a few dollars that would tide him over, perhaps, until he could find other employment of a sort. In so large a city no one was likely to trace him.

Then the element of bulldog tenacity that had made him stagger to his feet before the count of ten in the Speyer fight again came to the fore.

"Providence hates a quitter," he quoted. "I'm going back to fight this out. If I'm to take my medicine, I'll take it standing, and not sneak out of it."

Nevertheless, his pulses were pound-

ing faster than was their wont as he presented himself for duty at the Hyperion next day. He had planned no definite line of action, but had decided to let events take their course.

As he passed the savage old stage doorkeeper, the latter stopped him.

"Say, young feller," said the old man, "I kind of like you. You've been civil to me, and that's more'n most of the rest take the pains to be. That's why I'm going to tip you off."

"What about?" asked Cary, in surprise.

"I wouldn't go in there if I was you," said the doorman mysteriously. "They're fram'in' up somethin' on you. I don't know what it is, except I heard Speyer say he'd been workin' over it all mornin'. An' when Dick Speyer takes the bother to work overtime on anything, there's somethin' doin'."

"Thanks," said Max; "it was decent of you to warn me, but I never yet heard of a frame-up that wasn't made worse by a man's running away from it."

He hurried on. In another minute he was on the stage. Speyer was on the lookout for him. So were several of the boss' cronies.

They nudged each other as Max appeared. One of their number slipped away in the direction of the dressing rooms. Max noted these various signs, but paid no outward heed to them.

As he was crossing to his locker to put away his hat and coat, Speyer hailed him.

"Hello, Floyd!" he called in rough joviality. "We're all lined up to see the great reunion act, betwixt you and your missus. She dropped around to see you half an hour ago, and I told her I'd let her know as soon as you got here."

As he spoke, the man who had gone toward the dressing room came back.

"Well?" demanded Speyer, "where is she?"

"She's coming," reported the messenger doubtfully, and added: "Claire Dean was in there with her. They were chinning away like sisters. They're coming out together, Clair said."



The men looked at each other in troubled surprise. Evidently this new move was no part of their original program. The next moment two girls came out from the passage that led to the lower dressing rooms.

One was Claire, the other was tall, slender, rather overdressed; she scanned the group of men, and asked:

"Which is he?"

"Well, I'll be blessed!" exclaimed Speyer. "She don't recognize her own long-lost hubby!"

"My husband is not here," answered Pansy quietly. "He's not working at the Hyperion. I just learned that from Miss Dean."

"Then," demanded the bewildered Speyer, "why did you ask 'which is he?'"

"I mean," explained Pansy, "which is the man who is known as Karl Floyd?"

"I am the man," said Max, stepping forward.

"Can you give me any idea where my husband is?" she asked sweetly, with no trace of anger or surprise in her steady voice. "Miss Dean has told me that you are not Karl."

"Miss Dean?" cried Max. "How did she know?"

"Because," replied Claire, smiling on the dumfounded youth, "Karl Floyd was my brother's chum. I had known him ever since I was a child. He was the man I told you about—the theatrical man who got me my first place as wardrobe woman."

"And," stammered Max, "you knew—you knew from the first——"

"I knew you weren't Karl Floyd. I knew, too, that there must be some very good reason for your taking his name. And I was content to wait until you might care to explain the mystery. But now don't you think perhaps that time has come? It would be a pity to rob Mr. Speyer of his pretty surprise party, especially since it is likely to be his last in this theater."

"Whatcher mean by that?" growled Speyer.

"Only that I spoke to the house man-

ager about you Saturday night, Dick, after you forced your way into the workroom where this gentleman and I were talking. I told the manager one or two things. And he——"

"Which way is it?" called a peevish voice from the passage leading to the street. "They keep these theaters as dark in the mornings as if gas was as dear as radium."

The doorman's rough voice was heard giving the direction, and an instant later a dilapidated, little man strutted out on the stage.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### FORTUNE'S CHASE.

Max Cary looked at the newcomer twice before he recognized in the half-ragged figure the once spruce and sumptuously attired Karl Floyd.

"That old crank of a doorkeeper didn't want to let me in," announced Floyd to no one in particular, as he squinted around, trying to accustom his eyes to the dim light. "But when I told him one or two things, he glad-handed me all the way to the stage. I—hello, Pansy!" he broke off, recognizing his wife. "Didn't expect to see you here. You're looking fine."

After which "lovely" greeting, his eye fell on Claire.

"Why, Claire Dean!" he exclaimed. "Where on earth did you blow in from? Quite a family party, hey?"

"There's one more member of the family," remarked Max, walking up to him with outstretched hand, "that you haven't spoken to yet."

"Hello, old chap!" cried Floyd, wringing the other's hand. "It was you I came here to find. I'm glad to see you; gladder than you'll be to see me when I tell you I've come to grab your job—if I can still get it," he added, as an afterthought.

"You see," he explained to Pansy, "I ran into a cartload of soft money. Well, I ran out of it still faster. I even had to hock my glad rags, and buy these things I'm wearing now. Then I remembered I had a job, and that I'd

given it to another chap along with my name and my union card. So, being dead broke, I came to collect. Do I get it?"

"You surely do," said Max fervently, "as far as I'm concerned. I've had about enough of theatrical life to last me a century."

"Geel!" declared Floyd, "I'm in luck. I was half afraid you wouldn't be able to work the bluff. So I looked for you first at the office of that patent agent you'd told me about. When I found he hadn't heard from you, I figured out you must be here. Oh, by the way, I nearly forgot. When I told the agent I was going to see you, he asked me to give you this letter. Said he'd been looking for you everywhere."

Max tore open the soiled envelope, and glanced at the typewritten inclosure.

"Talk about Fortune chasing a man who turns his back on her!" Max exclaimed. "Floyd, my patent's been taken up by the Erie Navigation Company. That means success. They're to pay me a thousand dollars bonus and a royalty of——"

He broke off, and hurried over to Claire. Her shining eyes gave him his answer, and made mere speech unnecessary. Yet, womanlike, she had the last word.

"Before you say anything else," she whispered, "won't you please tell me your name? It's so—so awkward to become engaged to a man whose name one doesn't know."

## Hercules and the Hoddy-Doddy

By J. Lenivers Carew

Showing the value of headwork in contests of physical skill

CHANDLER'S MILLS is a small factory village in New England, very like indeed to all the other factory villages of that region.

It is made up of the great Chandler woolen mills, and what a fine lady called "the disagreeable but necessary barracks for the housing of the equally disagreeable but necessary inmates of the mills," a couple of general stores, a post office, and a church.

And then—only to be spoken of in a separate sentence—the mansions of the proprietors and their satellites, ranging from the austere, green-shuttered white boxes of the last mid-century to a few costly young bungalows lately erected for new-married Chandlers of the rising generation.

There are Ogdens and Shaws and Elliots and Spencers in the clan, but they deport themselves as Chandlers, and only mention their own real names apologetically, on necessary occasions like births and marriages.

When Harry Spencer came home

from college to slip into his waiting groove in the system, there was some speculation as to whether he would marry—or be married to, one might say—Janet Chandler or Harriet Shaw. Janet was the ranking eligible of the clan, but Harriet was prettier, and the Shaws were a growing power in the mills.

The Spencers were not powerful at the time, but Harry was rather popular, and gave promise of success in the business, so he simply had to be well taken care of, and guarded against himself.

He might have married Janet, if he'd had time, or maybe he'd have taken Harriet—he seemed to like them both well enough—but the matter was settled out of hand by Janet suddenly marrying a hopeless bookmaker from New York, and Harriet going her one better by eloping with a handsome actor. Thus Janet and Harriet pass out of the story as well as the clan.

It is said that Harry Spencer



laughed when he heard of the ventures of the two young women. Certain it is that he remained as cheerful as ever and became the popular bachelor of the community, and remained so for a matter of ten years, delving away at the task of becoming a captain of the woolen industry, and beguiling his leisure moments respectably at bridge and billiards and the popular outdoor sports of the times.

When Harry was thirty, little Dorothy Chandler—sister to the unmentionable Janet—became suddenly twenty, to the apparent surprise of every one.

She'd been a little girl so long that it startled the whole clan to think of getting together over the matter of a suitable mate for her. It was one of the times when there seemed almost a hitch in the system; Dorothy was an extra number; no correct provision had been made for her inevitable maturity.

There was John Chandler, a cousin, but he was at college, and reports had him dangerously wild. There was Archie Shaw, and the Shaws were safe, but he was hopelessly lost to a Boston girl, of satisfactory family, however.

There was also, as we have seen, Harry Spencer, already become the secretary of the corporation, and a gentleman of culture and interesting attainments, but no one seemed to give him a thought. He had become one of the early-middle-age set, and was accepted as a bachelor and nothing else.

It was a pretty serious mess for the house of Chandler to find itself in, with handsome actors and race-track fellows appearing on the frontiers from day to day; but the dainty and delightful Dorothy settled the affair by adopting Harry, all in a moment, as her playmate and slave.

There was no betrothal, or even courtship or anything like that, but the two simply got to be inseparable, riding, golfing, walking, reading, and being good chums generally; and the house of Chandler sat back with a smile of complacency upon its face, the thing might have turned out so much worse, you see; and ten years is a disparity to be commended rather than regretted.

Harry Spencer withdrew from the early-middle-age set and became rejuvenated. There never was anything of the rollicking boy about him; he was sedate by nature, and wore his eyeglasses and small mustache, and the simply tailored clothes upon his spare frame, with a quiet air of Bostonian reserve.

But he was gay in Dorothy's society, and she seemed to find genuine pleasure in his mild wit and gentle playfulness.

## II.

Late in the afternoon of a summer day, they were riding home from a long gallop in the country. In the course of conversation, Spencer had used the word hoddy-doddy.

"What is a hoddy-doddy, anyway, Harry?" queried Dorothy.

"Well," he answered, with a dry laugh, "I suppose I might offer myself as an illustration. I suppose I'm something of a hoddy-doddy."

"Why, it must be something mighty nice, then," said the girl.

The horses were walking neck and neck, and the man reached over and took her little, gloved hand and kissed it.

"I guess that's the sweetest thing that was ever said about a hoddy-doddy, Dot," he laughed, almost sadly.

"But why do you think you are one?" she persisted. "You haven't told me what a hoddy-doddy really is."

"Well, it's a sort of synonym of mollycoddle," he replied. "It's a man who doesn't buck the line as hard as he might; the man who prefers running to fighting. If I hadn't been a hoddy-doddy, I'd have agreed to shutting down the mills instead of compromising with the union."

"But you're unjust to yourself," she protested loyally; "you were making a stiff fight of your own; you were fighting for the poor laborers—and goodness knows they need a champion—and you won your fight at that."

"Thank you, Dotty," he said, with a pleased smile; "you view my actions through prejudiced eyes, I fear. It is the common opinion that I took the

course of least resistance, and humiliated the corporation in order to keep out of graver trouble. They say the union had me scared to a standstill."

They were passing the little railroad station, and a train had just pulled in. Passengers alighting at that station were generally French Canadian or Polish laborers, or members of the clan; but this time a new and unusual type appeared.

From the lone Pullman car leaped a young man of impressive proportions; six feet tall and three feet wide, with the head of a Greek gladiator and hands and feet proportionately heroic.

He was garbed in the height of extreme fashion, as portrayed by the plates in the magazines, and he was accoutered with golf clubs, walking sticks, a handsome yellow kit bag, and a steamer rug in a shawl strap.

He looked about expectantly as though for a conveyance suiting his rank, but the only vehicle for the accommodation of passengers was the solitary hack of the village.

"I bet I know who it is!" cried Dorothy suddenly, reining up her horse; "I bet it's Dan Chandler from Baltimore; you know he's coming to be papa's private secretary."

"Well, some one should have sent a trap for him," said Harry anxiously; "we'd better find out about it."

Just then the local jehu, a creature of more thrift than tact, moved upon the new arrival, and seized the kit bag and shawl strap with authority.

"Hold on there; not so fast!" cried the intended victim.

"I know where yer want'er go," said the jehu, making off with his prize; "yer goin' t'er the Chandlers, ain't yer?"

The young Hercules took a couple of long strides, and collared the countryman.

"Drop those things, you yap!" he shouted angrily. "Keep your dirty paws off my things till you're told to touch 'em." He lifted the jehu fairly off his feet, gave him a bulldog shake, and dropped him. At the same instant the scared yokel dropped the things, and

made off to a place of safety, grumbling sullenly.

"There, Dotty," said Harry Spencer in a whisper, "is a fair illustration of what a hoddy-doddy is *not*. There you have a man of militant energy and assertiveness. Now I should have yielded up my traps to the hackman, and followed him meekly to his lair."

Dorothy giggled softly.

"Isn't he funny, Harry?" she said. "He seems just like Bob Shaw's bull terrier."

"We're 'most all like dogs, I notice," said Spencer. "Now, I fancy I'm more like your cocker spaniel."

"You mustn't keep calling yourself names," she protested prettily; "but I can tell you there are a lot of people not as nice as my dog."

"Thanks," he answered. "He's a gentleman, anyway, isn't he?"

The traveler now looked toward them as they sat there on their horses. Harry Spencer smiled at him with friendly cordiality.

"My name is Spencer," he called. "Are you looking for any of the Chandlers?"

"Why, yes," answered the young man, with a pleased laugh. "I believe I'm going to live in this place, if they'll keep me. My name's Daniel Chandler."

Spencer dropped quickly from his horse, and hastened to shake hands with the new member of the tribe.

"I'm Henry Spencer," he said, introducing himself again.

The young giant fairly crushed his hand in a hearty grip.

"H'ware you?" he said cordially.

"Miss Chandler, may I present Mr. Chandler?" asked Spencer.

"I'm awf'ly glad to welcome you here, Mr. Chandler," laughed Dorothy. "I've heard all about you, you know. You're my third or fourth or fifth cousin, or something like that, aren't you?"

The young athlete sprang forward, hat in hand, as the girl leaned forward in the saddle and extended her hand.

"By dad, I'm mighty glad I came!" he cried, looking up into her face with palpable admiration.

"He's great fun, isn't he, Harry?"



she said afterward. "I think we'll like him, don't you? He's a regular Hercules."

"Yes, indeed, he's very jolly," answered Spencer, with something less of enthusiasm in his voice.

### III.

Dan Chandler was welcomed warmly by the Chandler's Mills aristocracy for his assertive physical charms, and the dashing city manner of him, which was by way of an innovation amid the established constraint of the careful New England atmosphere.

He took up his duties as secretary to the head of the mills with an easy abandon which impressed the latter into a sort of unconscious subordination.

Andrew Chandler had wielded the scepter during the years of his presidency with a solemn, methodical authority in keeping with worthy traditions, but the new secretary wrought a subtle change in him. Business hours became those when Mr. Daniel Chandler had no tennis or golf engagements, and to cover his weak complacency, the old man took up golf himself, with a zest quite remarkable in one of his years.

The administrative work likewise showed a change; the presidency became a dictatorship, and in a short time the erstwhile gentle scepter became a rod of iron. Labor troubles arose again, and, contrary to precedent, they were met arbitrarily; three hundred hands were discharged and the rest were served with an ultimatum.

Open hostilities followed, and the young secretary valiantly took the field, personally "smashing the face" of a burly walking delegate. By this simple expedient he became a hero, not only with the clan, but with the impressionable hands, as well, and the strike was settled in short order with all the advantage on the side of capital.

Thus, before the young hero had been a half year in the place, it was known to the discerning that he would be the next leader of the house.

Harry Spencer became, by contrast, a

mere well-bred nonentity. The conservative policies previously advocated by him with so much success went out of fashion.

Socially he was taken up again by the early-middle-age set. For a season he had had no time for the simple life of the married folk, but now he had time, and to spare, for Miss Dorothy had cousinly duties to perform.

The young secretary was inclined to homesickness, according to Dorothy, and it was her province to make his new life bearable from the social side.

Harry did not give up without a struggle. He chose to look upon the interloper at first as a mere boy, amusing to the young girl for the moment, and having the rights of a cousin.

Then, as things developed, he protested mildly against the growing indifference of the girl for his company, and she reminded him that he was really nothing but a friend, anyway, and had no right to criticize her actions.

He said he would resign his office, and go away from the place, and she laughed him into a hopeless blue funk.

The people were sympathetically amused; they patted Harry affectionately on the back, and gave him to understand that he was nothing but a has-been—too old to have serious ambitions in competition with handsome, heroic youth.

And the people were secretly delighted with the situation. Dan Chandler was the inevitable heir to the throne, and Dorothy was his one logical consort. The system would never have it otherwise.

### IV.

One day the private secretary and his principal's daughter met upon the tennis court. The young man shook his light, wavy hair in the breeze, and tossed his racket in his hand, making the gladiatorial muscles of him ripple enchantingly under his trim white flannels.

"Dot," he said suddenly, "I'm going to be promoted—and quite some, at that."

"Bully!" cried the girl delightedly. "What'll you be then, Dan?"

He drew himself up handsomely in mock dignity.

"I'll be the bloomin' bloated secretary of the bloomin' corporation," he said.

Dorothy was genuinely surprised.

"But what is Harry Spencer going to be?" she inquired.

"The old order changeth," said Chandler lightly. "Harry's going to be merely a historical character; he's 'going awa'ay fr'm heah.' Poor devil doesn't seem to care for the mills any more. He's resigned."

Her face clouded.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Dan," she said. "I'm mighty glad to hear of your good fortune, but I'm sorry we're going to lose Harry. He's an awfully nice fellow."

Chandler looked bored.

"The best of friends must part," he said, with mock seriousness; "and you've got me, Dot."

She laughed flippantly.

"Dear me!" she said; "I suppose that should console me for any sort of a loss."

"Well, it ought to," he replied. "I'll be a person of consequence now, and we can be married just as soon as we jolly well please. See!"

"No, I don't see!" she cried, a bit angrily. "This is quite unexpected. Do I understand that this is a proposal, *Mister Chandler*?"

"Take it any way you like, Dot," he said familiarly, and he suddenly threw his arm about her waist and drew her close to him.

She struggled vainly to get away from him. "Don't do that, Dan!" she protested; "some one will see us. Don't! This is all too sudden. I've never thought about you but just as a good friend and cousin, you know. Now please let me go."

"Well, you'd better begin to think, then," he laughed, "'cause it's all been fixed up for a long time. I've had it all fixed, and all the people have had it fixed, so it's all settled."

She tossed her head impatiently, and tried to push him from her, but he gathered her in his arms, lifted her off her feet, and kissed her several times. Then he let her go.

She stood and looked at him for an instant, her face crimson and clouded with anger; but she could find nothing to say, and turned presently and ran away in confusion. The man smiled a satisfied smile, and walked away in the other direction.

Spencer was in a bad way. He chose to call it overwork, and said his resignation must take effect at once, that he might get away for rest and change of scene. The men all liked him, and there was genuine regret on all sides at his quitting the mills.

They gave him a stag dinner at the Chandler's Mills Casino, and he sat amicably between the president, Andrew Chandler, and his rival and successor, Daniel Chandler.

The mills was very much of a temperance town, and there was little or no drinking among the members of the clan, except in a formal, conservative fashion on occasions.

But Mr. Daniel Chandler had brought with him a keen appreciation of wines and spirits, and, though constrained to suppress it amid the daily life and work, he embraced all legitimate opportunities to exercise it fittingly.

Therefore on the auspicious occasion of this tender farewell to a friend, he was early seen to be in a fine, mellow humor, and busily enhancing it by repeated potations.

Spencer was toasted and eulogized by one and all, and the affair was vastly pleasant and social until, toward the end of the dinner, Mr. Daniel Chandler arose, and offered a startling toast:

"To my future wife, gen'l'men: *Mistress Dorothy Chandler!*"

There were exclamations of surprise and consternation from all sides, and Howard Chandler, the young brother of Dorothy, leaned across the table, and touched his self-nominated brother-in-law on the arm.

"This is hardly the place for such an announcement, Dan," he said sharply; "particularly as we've heard nothing about it before. Better sit down."

Daniel leered at the youth pleasantly.

"No time like the present," he said



jocularly. "Wanted to get the start of your charming sister, my boy, in tellin' you all 'bout it. I may say that I kissed the lady at the Tennis Club this morning, an' I guess the whole bloomin' place knows about it by now."

Several of the men arose from the table, and uttered strong protests. Harry Spencer seized the man's arm, and drew him down into his seat.

"You've said enough, Chandler!" he said hoarsely, his face white as chalk.

The man looked about him in pained surprise.

"Why, jus' hear little Harry, here!" he chuckled. "Poor li'l Harry's gettin' real mad. Dis'pointed lover!"

"I'm not a match for you physically, Chandler," said Spencer, in a solemn, even voice, "and I never happened to hit a man in my life——"

"Lucky for you, you didn't!" laughed Chandler.

"But I've got to now!" finished Spencer, and quickly slapped the big fellow in the face.

## V.

It was all done in a second; the athlete snorted like a surprised bull, and then swung one of his arms carelessly toward his assailant, and the latter lay against the wall back of the table, in a huddled heap.

Pandemonium reigned instantly. There were loud cries of "Shame!" and "Put 'im out!" But the young giant stood up, and smiled pleasantly in such a way that no man seemed to care to take the initiative. Some went to the fallen guest of honor, and raised him up, gasping and faint.

"Too bad, Harry," said some one; "but you were a fool to hit him."

Spencer struggled to his feet, a new fire in his eye.

"I'm not through yet!" he declared, and made for the giant, striking out wildly with both hands.

"Don't let 'im!" they cried; "he'll be killed."

The tipsy giant held out his hands carelessly, and brushed away the blows of his assailant without apparent effort. "You fellers let 'im alone," he chuckled;

"he's a good feller; he's a gamer little sport than I thought he was. You let 'im alone, and I'll give 'im a boxing lesson."

The other men stood back irresolute, and looked on with fascination as the slender, erstwhile peaceable Spencer battled with his apparently invulnerable antagonist.

He fought desperately with both hands, struggling for an opening. He did not succeed, however, in getting in anything that even faintly resembled a blow.

Chandler continued to laugh, and seemed to enjoy the encounter as a huge joke.

"Ain't he cute?" he asked jocosely, turning his head toward the spectators.

And in that unguarded moment one of the small but hard fists of Spencer found its way in, and fairly flattened the nose of the giant upon his face. They say the contour of that face was never again quite so admirable.

As the blood spurted, the surprised man let out a volley of soul-chilling oaths and epithets, and he was seen to raise his hands and let them fall several times.

But Spencer was no longer so easy a mark. While he was physically no match for his opponent, he now showed that he was not without a sense of the science of boxing, and he guarded himself warily.

The show of resistance angered the larger man, and he began to go at the offender with vindictive violence. Several partially parried blows landed on Spencer's body, shaking him to his very soul, but he kept resolutely on his feet, and made heroic efforts to prolong the battle and stave off what seemed the inevitable end.

In one of his rushes Chandler received a hard jolt in the eye, and he roared like a baited bull. With his hard breathing and angry grunts, he mixed guttural, gasping oaths and epithets which turned against him whatever shred of popular sympathy there may have been in the company.

Cries came from all the lookers-on to stop the battle; but, as usual, no one

moved to take the initiative. Each man felt indignant with his neighbor for remaining inactive.

Young Howard Chandler, excited and boyishly indignant, stepped dangerously near the combatants and tried to make his objections heard.

"Stop! Stop it!" he yelled shrilly. "You've got to stop this. It—it's awful. Stop it, Dan!"

He tried courageously to put his arms between the fighters, and this puny interference added to the giant's ire.

"Beat it!" he roared savagely, and swung an arm at the youth. With a grunt of pain, the unsuccessful peace-maker went backward, and fell in a huddled heap under the table.

But in the same instant Spencer's right shot out, and landed on the point of the brute's jaw. Cries of applause filled the air, and the big fellow wavered for a moment, pawed the air desperately, and then crashed to the floor.

"One! Two! Three!—" began one of the irrepressible guests, with light-hearted authority; and there was scarcely a sound in the room while Dan Chandler lay inert upon the floor, and "took the count" without a murmur or an effort to regain his feet.

Harry Spencer stood still with his arms hanging listlessly at his sides, and looked at his fallen antagonist with dull eyes. Suddenly he reeled and toppled over in a heap—"all-in."

Some of the men picked up the battered victor, and bore him tenderly out into the cold night air.

"Carry him to my house," ordered Arthur Ogden, "and I'll get a doctor."

And while some of them remained to minister to the slight injuries of young Howard, not a hand was raised to succor the big fellow on the floor. No one cared to take the chance of being regarded as his friend.

## VI.

The next day Harry Spencer lay in a steamer chair at the Ogden house, and received a few visitors. His head was swathed in bandages, from which one discolored eye peeped forth. One arm

was in a sling, and, under his coat, some shattered ribs were strapped with surgeons' plaster.

Miss Chandler was announced by Mrs. Ogden.

Spencer started from his chair, and groaned with the resultant pain.

"I can't see her," he sighed; "I'm not a fit sight for her, you see."

"But she's bound to come in," said Mrs. Ogden. "Says she must see you at once."

"Of course, I'm going to see you," said Dorothy, entering the room without further ceremony.

Spencer laughed weakly, and held out his free hand.

"I say, it's fine of you to come," he said, "but I'm not an agreeable object to look at, Dorothy. You see now an example of a hoddy-doddy who didn't know his part in life when the time came."

The girl's eyes grew very bright and moist.

"I'm very sorry, Harry," she said brokenly. "I've heard all about it. You were splendid, Harry. And now I've come to tell you—they asked me to do it—to tell you the company insists on your reconsidering your resignation."

"But I—I can't," stammered Spencer. "Your cousin has accepted my place."

"Well, I guess he'll never get it," she said vehemently. "The officers and directors have all offered their resignations to papa, to accept if he doesn't send Cousin Dan away at once. And they've expelled him from the club."

"It's too late," said Spencer. "I don't want to stay here, anyway, Dorothy. Perhaps you know why?"

"Why?" asked the girl ingenuously.

"Because I can't have you," he answered simply.

"I've never really said you couldn't have me," she cried. "And I don't believe you've ever really asked me, Harry."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Spencer. "I've been the prince of hoddy-doddies, all right-o; but I'm for the reform wagon, Dorothy, and you're coming along."



# The Bully on the Slab

By Burt L. Standish

Readers who enjoy a good story whatever it may be about, here is a feast for you. Fans, this is your pie—a really corking baseball yarn, but different. Bullies in all sports have to be taken care of; this is a striking instance, and an entertaining, amusing one.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE BULLY.

GET back from the pan—get back, or I'll hit you!" snarled Vampire Cross, glaring at McLeod, the youthful catcher of the "Marks."

Stevens, the manager of the Markville club in the Triangle League, a three-cornered organization having no connection whatever with the National Association, sat on the bench, helpless and caloric under the collar.

In vain he had protested against the bullying, intimidating methods of Vamp Cross, the speedy left-hand pitcher of the Hamburg nine, an old-timer whose ability to terrorize the young batters of the opposing teams had made him so valuable in the eyes of the manager of the "Hams" that he drew a salary larger than that received by most pitchers outside the big-league teams.

Stevens' protests had simply provoked chortles from Manager Dorner and his backers in Hamburg, while Ryder, who had charge of the "Comets," the third team of the so-called league, doubtless having in mind the methods employed in games by Dingle, his own catcher, simply shook his head and said nothing.

Now, with considerable satisfaction, Stevens saw young McLeod, a college lad, as were nearly all of the Markville players, smile sweetly, yet defiantly, at the glowering bully on the pitcher's slab.

He was a youngster Stevens had picked up a few days before, his little college not belonging to those that put the seal of professionalism on students who play summer baseball, and, from

his record and what he had seen of his work, the manager felt confident that he had secured a jewel of a backstop.

"Get back!" cried Cross once more, with a savage, threatening gesture of his arm.

Having few curves and depending almost wholly on his speed, it was a feature of this man's method to frighten batters into retreating and then whip the ball like a streak of light over the outside corner just beyond reach.

This he always tried on a man who could successfully meet the hot ones on the inside corner; and, having already faced Vamp once in the present game and cracked out a close one for a safety, McLeod was regarded as dangerous.

"Come, come," beamed the youthful batter pleasantly. "Pitch the ball. I'm in my box."

Into Vamp's eyes leaped a wicked look. With a snap of his arm, through which he somehow put amazing speed into the sphere, he shot the ball straight at McLeod's head.

The ball almost grazed McLeod's cap as he dropped to the ground in a sitting posture.

Stevens made a gesture, and instantly Hardy, first baseman and captain of his team, was protesting to the umpire.

The Marks were playing in Hamburg, however, and the man who had been chosen to render decisions on the plays of the game was weak-kneed.

Instantly the crowd, containing not a few hoodlums, began howling at Hardy and demanding that the umpire should make him play ball or put him out of the game.

The fans of that town believed in winning fairly if they could, but they

believed in winning, anyhow; a game lost was a disgrace, while a game won, even by crass and questionable methods, was a glory to gloat over.

The umpire waved Hardy back to first, and ordered McLeod, who had picked up his bat and stepped out of the box as he rose, to play.

"No use," called a reckless Markville supporter, who had bravely taken his life in hand and ventured to watch the contest from the Hamburg bleachers; "you can't get a square deal here, boys."

Instantly his voice was drowned, and he was insulted by the catcalls and jeers of the Hamburgers around him.

One man, two rows higher up, even reached over and smashed the hat of the protestor down over his ears.

In that time sporting blood in Hamburg meant anything but a wish for fair play and a desire to see the best teams win; and a local citizen who had ventured to applaud any clever performance of the opposing nine would have stood in peril of assassination or incarceration in an institution for the insane.

Indeed this spirit had proved contagious and had spread into the other two towns of the league. Even in Markville it threatened to become epidemic.

The indiscreet Markvillian having been suppressed, and McLeod returned to the batter's box, Vamp Cross teetered on his toes, leering with an evil eye at the man with the war club.

Hardy, with a hopeless glance in Stevens' direction, resumed his position on the coaching line near first base.

Satisfied that he had the batter properly frightened, Cross whipped over an outside corner scorcher.

McLeod snapped his bat round sharply, and met the sphere on the trade-mark, sending it sailing over center-field fence.

With the exception of one man, the Hamburg hoodlums sat silent on the bleachers, sullenly watching the smiling batter as he trotted over the sacks and came home. The one who was not

silent, a tough, red-faced specimen, rose and reviled Vampire Cross.

"What's the matter with yer, Vamp?" he shouted sneeringly. "Lettin' mommer's baby boy bump you for a homer! What do we pay yer for? Go lay down an' let a pitcher pitch. You're a has-been. You never could pitch, anyhow. I see your finish; the Marks will pound you outer the box. You're a dead one."

Vamp said nothing. One look he cast toward the indignant, insulting reviler, his thin lips curling back from his teeth in a wolfish grin; then he turned, his jaws set over the chew of gum, and sullenly watched McLeod circle the diamond.

Stevens knew what was passing in the mind of Vampire Cross, and, while he did not wish to disturb McLeod's nerve, the boy was valuable to him, and he thought best to warn him.

"Well done, Mac," he said, as the young chap came to the bench and sat beside him. "That shows that anybody who can bat at all can hit Vamp's speed. But he's a vicious brute, and you want to watch out, for he won't love you much after this."

"Ho!" laughed McLeod. "He can't frighten me. Hit him! Of course. All he's got is a straight ball and a bluff."

Nevertheless, in spite of McLeod's example, with scarcely an exception the rest of the players were nervous when they had to wield the bat, and Cross, taking particular pains to keep them so, had an easy time of it.

Stevens felt that he was facing a problem that demanded solution. Either he must find fearless batters to fill the places of the timid ones or discover some method through which Vamp could be cured of his bullying tactics.

At this stage of the season, when nearly all summer ball players who were any good had been gobbled up, the former procedure was impractical, if not impossible; therefore, he must resort to the latter alternative if he had the slightest ambition to maintain anything like respectable standing in the percentage column.



But how to cure Vampire—that was the question.

In the seventh inning, McLeod faced Cross again. As before, the young fellow trotted into the box, beaming pleasantly on the fearsome twirler.

He had a habit of giving the plate a tap with the end of his bat before assuming position to hit. He did so now, and lifted the club.

There was a shout. Cross had pitched, putting every possible ounce of speed into the ball, which he shot straight at McLeod's body.

The batter had no time to dodge. The ball struck his left arm fairly halfway between shoulder and elbow. On the bench Stevens heard the thud of the impact, mingled with something like a snapping sound.

McLeod went down as if hit by a bullet.

Stevens was the first one to reach him. When they picked him up he was pale and faint.

His arm was broken.

## CHAPTER II.

### SEEKING A REMEDY.

To one wholly unfamiliar with the savage fierceness of baseball as played in some of the bush leagues, it may seem doubtful that such conditions can exist.

To those who have seen it, however, and especially to such as have taken part in the almost brutally fought games, there has come the knowledge that such intense, heartbreaking struggles, such enthusiasm, such loyalty, such mad rejoicing in victory and such fathomless dejection in defeat may never be experienced elsewhere.

True the genuine fan who follows the big-league games may be enthusiastic and loyal, but in him such emotions are thin and watery compared with the enthusiasm and loyalty of the real fans in some little league town of four or five thousand inhabitants.

In the small places the follower of the games comes to know the players of his home town personally and to call

them familiarly by their abbreviated front names or acquired "handles."

To him the ball tossers are "good old Tap," or "Chick," or "Gramp," or "Bunk"; and a judge of probate may feel highly honored when one of these demigods of the diamond deigns him a nod and a smile on the main thoroughfare of the one-horse burg.

The teams are usually made up of college chaps who need the money and find ball playing in summer the easiest way to get it, young would-be professionals who for some reason have not made the minor leagues, and old stagers having certain faults or weaknesses that have caused them to be "canned."

Despite the superior knowledge or ability of the old stagers, the most valuable and successful players in the unrecognized leagues are earnest, honest college men and the ambitious youngsters who wish to become professionals and are out to make records.

The canned vet is prone to regard the greenies with more or less contempt, and often he breeds dissension and discord on his own team.

The honest, ambitious youngster will take chances that the vet would not think of doing, trying for everything that comes his way in the field and pounding himself mercilessly in base sliding.

On one of Stevens' teams he once had a chancey and sensational base pilferer whose wonderful work on the sacks was the talk of the entire league and the admiration and glory of the home town. He had participated in six or seven games when the manager saw him, one day, strip for the shower.

It actually seemed that there was scarcely a square inch of that chap's body that was not black and blue, raw or covered by partly healed abrasions. After that Stevens had to hold him in check with a firm hand, for he was valuable and he didn't wish to see him use himself up completely.

The rivalries between the teams in these small leagues almost invariably becomes intense and bitter, and the enthusiasts of each town, while admiring and almost worshiping their own play-

ers, come to hold feelings of distrust, contempt, and hatred, even, for the players of other teams, all of whom are generally thought unfair, dishonorable, or brutal.

As the season progresses this high tension of feeling sometimes leads to personal encounters of a fistic nature between the patrons of the game belonging in different towns.

Imagine the sensation in Marktown when their team returned with young McLeod, his arm in splints and a sling, and the citizens learned just how his injury had been received.

Of course Vamp Cross had protested that he had not intended to hit the lad, but there were his previously uttered threats to contradict him, and not a single Marktownner was disposed to give the bullying pitcher the benefit of the doubt. In fact, there seemed to be no doubts.

There was talk of tar and feathers for Vamp, and all that, but Hamburg had a way of sending a huge delegation of her husky fans along with her team whenever it filled a date in Marktown, and everybody knew that the reprisal suggested was out of the question.

Yet when one indignant citizen proposed that Marktown withdraw from the league and disband its team, he barely escaped lynching on the spot.

What, let Hamburg drive them out? Give them a chance to sneer and jeer and call them babies and quitters? Never!

But something must be done. The intimidated youngsters of the nine, while justly outraged and indignant, were now, to the last chap, rendered perfectly worthless as batters whenever Vampire should be sent onto the firing line against them; and it was certain that the Hamburg manager would continue to keep him for that particular purpose.

A directors' meeting was called that night, and the question was hotly discussed by the ten men of the organization who had each contributed fifty dollars toward team expenses, to their credit let it be said more through genuine enthusiasm for the game than to

acquire the doubtful honor of being called directors.

Finally Stevens was appealed to; what did he propose to do?

"Gentlemen," said he, "I have been doing some tall thinking, and I hope I have got an inkling of a method by which we may be able to put the kibosh on Vamp Cross. It is hardly advisable for me to speak of my plan now, even with your pledge of secrecy. I trust you will not urge me. Simply leave it to me, and I will do my level best."

This was far from satisfactory to a few of them, but the majority were willing that the manager should shoulder the load, and the meeting finally adjourned after he had obtained permission to go ahead with any plan he might have in mind, and the assurance that the organization would back him up.

That night he wrote the editor of a certain sporting paper, giving a concise statement of the condition of affairs in the Triangle League, and asking him to recommend a big, brutal bully of a pitcher who could be depended on to overawe anybody of the same stripe and character he might chance to find himself up against.

It was five days before he received a reply to his letter. When he got one at last it came from a small town in western Massachusetts.

It was as follows:

dear Sur, mr. Jim murning eddetur of the *Reccord* has Sent yore lettur to me, and I am the man yore looking for you bett yore life. I inclose Some noose papper extracks about me and my pitching so you cann se what I have doan. I doant want brag aboute myself but I'll garranty to delivir the goods you warnt dilivird. I am Six foot 2 inch high and way 218 (libs) pouands. I am all-soe a prize fiter as one of the extracks wil Show you. wil come just Soone as you send ralerode ticckit. Pleas keep noose papper extracks for me or send them too me by male when you Send the ralerode ticckit.

yores truly,

WILLIAM BUCKFORD.

Stevens read the newspaper clippings, about a dozen in number, nearly all of them being reports of certain baseball games in which William Buckford had pitched. They were flattering.



One told how he had pitched a no-hit, no-run game.

True, he knew little concerning the teams mentioned, with the exception of one, of which, it chanced, he had heard that it was a very fast independent organization that had taken a fall out of several league teams.

One clipping told of Mr. Buckford's appearance in the prize ring, on which occasion he had put Mike Sullivan, a heavyweight, away in the third round.

These clippings, together with the fact that Jim Murning, of the *Sporting Record*, had sent the letter of appeal to Buckford, brought a favorable decision, for, if any man in the country knew ball players for precisely what they were, it was Murning.

Stevens sent Buckford a railroad ticket and a message to report in Markville just as soon as he could possibly get there.

### CHAPTER III.

#### ENTER MR. BUCKFORD.

Stevens never forgot his first sight of William Buckford as he stepped off the train at the station.

The manager had said nothing to any one concerning him, and he was on hand quite by his lonesome to meet the new man; but he knew he was his man as he descended, battered suit case in hand, from the car steps.

Mere words seem inadequate to give a truthful picture of Mr. Buckford; only a portrait artist of talent could have painted him in a satisfactory manner. He was, without dispute, the toughest-looking brute ever seen.

He had long arms and legs, narrow hips, hunched shoulders, and a neck like that of a bull. It would have exhausted an ordinary man to carry his feet in a half-mile walk.

Stevens' own hand is far from dainty, but Buck's tremendous, knotted paw smothered it when they shook. Beetling brows, a lopsided, broken nose, and an undershot jaw gave him the look of a battered bulldog.

Not only was the ugliness of his mug enhanced by various scars of battle, but

there were numerous strange and terrible scars upon the back of his neck, some of them extending upward even to the border of the cap that was perched on the crown of a crop of bristling red hair, cut "dead rabbit."

Stevens' heart leaped for joy. In physical appearance, at least, this was the treasure he sought. If he could pitch only half as well as the newspaper clippings had seemed to indicate, the manager doubted not that he had found the solution of the problem.

"Well, old top," Buckford said in a rasping, raucous voice that matched his general brutal appearance most delightfully, "here I am. Say, dat's a bum train. I got cinders in me eyes an' a coat of smoke dat a Turkish bath couldn't start de outer layer of. An' dry—say, lead me to a bar where I can get a tub of suds. Wot's dat? No bars in dis town? Wot sort of a cemetery have I fell into? I'm sick. I need a nip ter brace me. Oh, well, take me to your best hotel an' lemme t'row a cart-load o' grub under me vest. I'll start a famine round dese parts. We'll talk business arter I git a feed."

Stevens took him to the hotel and saw him eat everything in sight except the cutlery and china, and several times he thought he was going to swallow his food-loaded knife as he plunged it into the mighty gash in his countenance. Everybody in the dining room stared at him, and the manager didn't wonder.

After dinner Stevens handed him a cigar, and they smoked in his room, while the manager gave him a complete understanding of the situation. Buckford's deep-set eyes glowed with joy beneath the bushy red eyebrows.

"Say, leave it ter me, son," he rumbled, with a contemptuous wave of one huge hand. "I've heard of dis here Vamp Cross; he's a big bag o' wind. Watch Old Buck let der gas outer him. When d'yer play dese Hams ag'in?"

"This afternoon."

"Where?"

"In Hamburg. That's eight miles away. It takes only forty minutes to get there. We leave on the one-thirty trolley."

"I ain't feelin' O. K., fer it allus makes me seasick ter ride on a train, but I'll pitch dat game jest der same. If I make good ter-day, I want t'irty plunks a-week an' board right here at dis joint. Does that go?"

"That goes," was Stevens' assurance, given with a readiness which brought to Old Buck's face a look of regret born, undoubtedly, of sorrow because he had not demanded more.

It was the custom to travel to Hamburg in playing suits, thus avoiding the trouble of making a change at the field. This day, however, Buckford wore his usual clothes, while Stevens carried in a hand satchel the roomiest uniform he could obtain. The manager had not yet introduced him to his players, and he saw a look of amused tolerance on the big fellow's face as he looked the young chaps over and listened to their talk about Vamp Cross. Once he winked at Stevens with the whole broadside of his face.

As he seemed to be totally broke, Stevens had given him a quarter, with which he bought an admission ticket at the gate.

A great crowd had turned out to watch the Hams eat up the Marks once more, for that was one of the pleasures few ball cranks in Hamburg could deny themselves, and the visiting team was greeted with jeering cheers as it marched toward its bench.

Old Buck trailed carelessly along behind, attracting some attention, for such a figure as his could not escape notice. Stevens glanced back once, and saw him looking the hooting crowd over with scornful contempt.

While practice was in progress, the manager slipped under the grand stand with the hand satchel, and Buck followed a moment later. There Stevens left him to get into the uniform he had brought.

But when he failed to appear after sufficient time had elapsed, he returned to learn what was the matter. He found Buck generally overflowing from that uniform.

"Say, what did yer gimme a boy's size fer?" he growled. "Looker here,

I'm liable ter bust out of dis any old place. I can't wear nuttin' like dis, old top."

"It's the largest suit we have," Stevens said. "Can't you make it go somehow?"

"If I break loose an' git arrested fer bein' only half dressed, you'll have ter pay me fine," returned Buckford.

Old Buck came forth in a Markville uniform. Instantly his appearance created a stir, and he was watched by many Hamburg players and spectators as the manager introduced him to Fred Hardy.

"Buckford will pitch this game, Hardy," he said. "Give him a chance to warm up."

While the new pitcher was limbering his arm, Stevens saw a bunch of Hams get together and talk in low tones, casting frequent glances toward the warlike appearing giant. Inwardly he rejoiced, but outwardly he was calm and unmoved.

Vamp Cross had shaken the kinks out of his wing and retired to the bench; but he, too, having observed Buck, joined the group of players who were whispering with their heads together.

The time for the game to begin drew near. The umpire appeared with two new balls in their bright red boxes, and Stevens gave his batting order to the scorers.

Old Buck, warming up, threw just one swift ball to the catcher. He seemed to choose a time when many eyes were upon him, and, with a long backward swing, he nearly scorched the air with the sphere, which seemed almost to lift the catcher off his feet as it plunked into the mitt.

"Play ball!" called the umpire.

Markville was first at bat. The Hams trotted onto the field, Cross swaggering out toward the pitcher's box. The first batter nervously selected a stick, and advanced toward the plate.

At this juncture Old Buck rose from the bench, and walked forward to the edge of the diamond, his movements attracting almost every eye and causing a hush to fall on the great crowd. With his eyes fixed on Cross and his bulldog



jaw outthrust, Buckford spoke in a loud, harsh, fearsome voice.

"Gents," he said, as if addressing everybody within hearing, although his eyes never wavered for an instant from the face of Cross, "carelessness is responsible fer a whole lot o' accidents in dis game er baseball, but I want ter say right here dat it's a safe bet dat nobody will be hit ter-day wit' der ball. Get dat!"

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### OLD BUCK GETS BUSY.

Nobody was hit. All through the game Vamp Cross was as mild as a balmy day in June; never once by word or sign did he seek to intimidate a batter.

In the first inning, after two were out, Old Buck took his turn with the war club. He didn't slash at Vamp's speed. Seeming to pick out one to his fancy, he stuck out the bat and bumped a liner into an empty field for two sacks. It seemed ridiculously easy and simple for him.

"That," said Stevens to the players near him on the bench, "is the way to hit Vamp's speed, as I've been telling you all along. Stop swinging your heads off. Just meet the ball, that's all."

Hitherto, on account of their fears, such instructions had been useless, but now, seeing that Cross had suddenly become very gentle in his demeanor, and encouraged by Buck's example and presence, the Marks began to brace up.

In the second inning even little Ted Emery, somewhat slightly known as "Mamma's Darling," poked out a clean single which aided in the netting of two tallies.

Stevens could see that they had Vampire going; the crowd saw it, too, and again they jeered him. This time, however, their ridicule simply led him to turn a glance in Old Buck's direction, which assured him that the giant was watching him like a hawk, and he sadly continued to pitch in a respectable and legitimate manner.

Buckford's pitching seemed effective

enough during the early innings of the game. He had a long, slow swing, but he could put speed into the pill, and his curves seemed sufficient to bother the best Hamburg stickers. Indeed, he was so good that for four innings not a Ham reached first.

In the fifth, however, a local man got to the initial sack on an error, and, Buck sticking to his sweeping, swinging delivery, stole second and third on the next two balls pitched. Plainly on that delivery runners could chase round the bases behind Buckford's back at their pleasure.

"Cut out that long swing with runners on, Buck," said Stevens, as soon as he got the chance. "When you use it the best catcher in the business can't keep men from stealing."

"Don't choke, old top," said Buck, with little regard for the dignity of the manager's position. "You ain't seen no Hamburg steaks connectin' wit' der fryin' pan, has yer? Let 'em steal. Wot's dat amount ter if dey can't git home?"

Then he wandered away under the grand stand for a few moments, finally reappearing, slyly wiping his mouth on the back of his hand.

In six innings the Marks piled up five tallies. In the seventh, aided by two hits, an error, and the ability to purloin bases at will, the Hams got two runs. At the end of that inning, instead of coming to the bench, Old Buck trotted away and vanished beneath the stand once more.

When he came forth his breath had an aroma that impregnated the open atmosphere for some distance around him, and he seemed disinclined to let Stevens approach him.

The eighth proved a whitewash for Marks, but in the last half the encouraged Hamburgers again went after Old Buck, who seemed to be losing his efficiency.

Again they secured two scores, which set the crowd into roars of rooting, grown confident, after their usual manner, that the Marks would surrender another scalp to their warriors.

Stevens had sent another pitcher to

warm up and was about to substitute him when Buck surprised him by striking out two good batters, which checked the enemy one run behind.

This time Stevens followed Old Buck under the stand, and caught him taking a swig out of a nearly emptied pint bottle.

"Here!" he cried angrily, "what do you think you're doing?"

Buck let another swallow slip down his throat before he lowered the bottle and turned a coldly wondering eye upon his manager.

"Wot you doin' here, old top?" he returned composedly. "Haden't you better stay out dere an' keep dem colts o' yourn keyed up an' workin'? We may need another run or so ter nail der game safe."

In his anger, Stevens took the bottle away from him, and smashed it, expecting to find himself promptly engaged in a one-sided fight with the giant. To his surprise, Old Buck almost blubbered as he remonstrated.

"Say, dat's a rotten deal ter hand out ter a sick man," he complained. "I tole you it always made me ill ter ride on a train, an' I jest brought dat pint along ter brace up on. Now you've gone an' wasted most a whole square drink."

"And you've guzzled nearly a full pint of whisky while this game was in progress," Stevens retorted. "It's a wonder you can stand, and a greater wonder that you can see the plate. I'll put Burrows in to finish the game."

Old Buck grabbed him by the shoulder.

"Don't do dat," he pleaded. "Dat'll be me finish. I've got Vamp Cross buffaloed, an' I'll win der game if you let me pitch it out. If I don't, you can let me walk back home. Gimme a square show, old top."

"You're not giving me a square show," Stevens returned, but little mollified. "I understand now how it happened that I found you out of a job at this stage of the season."

However, he wanted him to finish that game and win it, fully as much as Old Buck himself desired to do so; and therefore, when Hamburg came to bat

for the last time, he kept Buckford in, although he had determined to yank him out if he proved too rotten.

The first man slashed a hot grounder toward third, which was scooped and winged across to first for a put-out, which caused Old Buck to make a lurching bow toward the bench on which Stevens was seated.

The man who followed lifted a tremendous fly into the far outfield, but it was caught after a hard run, and again Buckford bowed toward the bench.

The crowd was roaring all through this, but the noise did not seem to disturb him at all. Indeed, he could not have been more oblivious to it if he had been stone deaf.

Holding his quivering nerves steady, Stevens waited.

The next batter lifted a little pop fly to Buckford, who dropped it.

Then pandemonium broke loose. The crowd was standing, yelling like crazy Indians. They surged toward the diamond, making a terrible clamor.

Again Stevens was tempted to send forth a substitute pitcher, but something kept him from doing so.

The runner galloped down to second on the next pitched ball, the catcher making a desperately vain throw to get him.

It was a strike, however.

The following pitch was almost wild, being barely stopped by a wonderful leaping reach by the catcher.

The runner made third at a jog.

"Tie it up, boys!" was the cry from the crowd. "You've got 'em going! Win it right here! It's our game!"

Stevens would have acknowledged that he was not feeling very well. Still, he waited, doubtful, anxious, angry, and desperate. To lose this game meant the downfall of all his hopes.

The batter fouled the next ball.

"Strike two!" cried the umpire.

Old Buck grinned hazily. As he wound up to pitch again, the man on third ran almost halfway down the base line.

The batter met the ball fairly and squarely. There was a ringing crack,



and the sphere shot away on a dead line.

Somehow Buck thrust out his bare right hand, and caught it.

The game was ours, and the wild yelling of the crowd died away in a groan of dismay. Disappointed Hamburgers turned at once and hurried toward the wide-open gate.

Old Buck came lurching up to Stevens.

"Told yer I'd do it, didn't I?" he cried thickly, holding out his hand.

But the manager turned his back on him without a word, pretending he did not see the proffered hand.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE DOWNFALL OF A HERO.

The news of victory had reached Markville ahead of the team, and a great crowd, with horns and bells and drums and other noise-producing instruments or implements, was on hand to give them welcome when the trolley rolled into the main street of the village.

The telephone had told them that Cross had pitched for Hamburg, and all about Markville's new twirler who had made Vamp behave. Everybody wanted to see Old Buck.

They saw him, and Stevens heard them telling one another that the new member was a sure enough brute from Bruteville. Their admiration for the ugly giant was boundless.

Two or three of the directors found Stevens and offered congratulations, while the remainder of the town was cheering Mr. Buckford.

"That was a great idea," said one enthusiastically. "He's a fierce thing. He could eat up twenty Vamp Crosses and look round for more."

"He is a prize fighter, as well as a pitcher," said Stevens. "That's why I took him on. He had rather fight than eat any day. Look at the scars he carries. They speak for themselves."

Old Buck owned the town that night. Wherever he went he was followed by a flock of admirers, all anxious to buy

him anything from a cigar to an automobile.

He stood on the corners and discoursed to gaping throngs about the great games in which he had pitched and the notable pugilists he had knocked out.

Late in the evening some misguided ones started in to furnish all the drinks he wanted, and he came pretty near lapping up all the booze that could be procured from kitchen grogshops and private lockers.

About nine somebody found Stevens getting out of a barber's chair, and informed him that Buck was on Main Street and needed his attention.

The manager discovered him calmly sleeping in the gutter of the town's busiest street, his head on the curbing, with his folded coat beneath it. With assistance, he got Old Buck to his room in the hotel, and put him to bed.

To his surprise, the pitcher came out the next morning, apparently none the worse for his little celebration.

They had a serious talk. The manager gave it to him straight, and he listened with an appearance of respect.

"You don't want ter mind, old top," he said. "I explained wot was der reason dat I took a little stimerlant in dat game yesterday. I just had ter have it. Last night—oh, well, all der Joshuays round here wanted ter stan' treat, an' a man can't refuse booze w'en it's free as water. Leave it ter me, now, an' I'll show you I'm der real stuff. Look how good Vamp Cross was. Why, der kids will bat him out next game; dey'll put der blanket on him. You say der Comets have a catcher dat needs me consideration. Watch me ca'm him down. I'll have him eatin' outer me hand. I'm der most valuable pitcher you could hire at any price, so wot's der use ter raise a holler. Fergit it."

And when they played the Comets, Old Buck simply squelched Dingle, who never oncè offered to deflect a bat. Stevens took good care to keep whisky away from him in that game, and, though he did not pitch, playing in right field, he awed his opponents into decency, and Markville won.

In Markville Buckford was the most popular person imaginable, even though, under influence of liquor, he bullied nearly everybody, including the solitary policeman, who would not have dared, single-handed, to attempt to arrest Buck on any provocation or demand.

He carried his bullying into the team after a time, although he always seemed to browbeat the young ball players in a bantering, good-natured way.

Sometimes he carried this so far that they were angrily resentful, though they did not dare rebel against it.

And how about his prophecy that the Marks could bat Vamp Cross out the next time Cross had the nerve to pitch against them?

Only once during the game did Vamp show a symptom of the old bullying propensity, but when he attempted to frighten one of the kid batters, Old Buck simply rose to his feet near the bench, bent a look upon him from beneath beetling brows, extended one gnarled open hand, palm downward, projected his bulldog jaw, and mildly called:

"Dat'll do, Vampy—dat'll do. Cut it out."

Immediately the great Ham pitcher wilted.

In the fifth inning of the game, Buck leading off with a fine single, the Marks fell on Cross and gave him no mercy. Having ceased to "slash," they met the ball beautifully, and put Cross up into the air in short order, forcing Dorner to bench him.

Cross took this so to heart that he asked for his release that very night, and got it.

Old Buck, however, gradually became intolerable. Finding that Stevens watched him so closely during games that he could get no drinks, he filled up regularly in advance, and came to the field in such a condition that he was useless. Even when Stevens could keep him sober, his opponents ran bases at will if they could reach first, and twice the manager pulled him out too late to avert defeat.

Eventually it was impossible to find him sober any time, day or night.

Then Stevens called him to his office, and handed him his salary up to date and his release.

Truly, no one ever saw a man who seemed to take anything so keenly to heart. He shed tears and begged pitifully.

"Dis is goin' ter be me ruin, old top," he sobbed. "D'yer know Connie Mac has got his blinks on me, an' I've been promised a tryout on der Athletics next spring if I make good down here. You can see how it is: if I'm fired offen a team in dis two-cent, never-heard-of, back-pasture bush league, Connie won't give me a look in. I can pitch baseball w'en I'm sober, an' you know it, old top."

"But you're never sober," said Stevens.

"Say, boss, gimme another show, an' I'll climb on der sprinkler—I will dat. I'll cut out der addle juice. I won't touch another drop while I'm in dis town. I swear it by all I holds sacred. Say, you can't be hard-hearted enough ter trun me down after I've promised dis way! You've got a gizzard."

Stevens took him back, and he believes—although he is not sure—that the pitcher kept sober for one whole day. However, for a time, he took care to make a pretense of sobriety before his manager, and sometimes Stevens "pitched him" three or four innings at the first of a game. Always he would weaken after he had pitched a while, compelling the manager to take him out.

One day a traveling man saw and recognized Old Buck. He asked about him, and heard the stories concerning the manner in which Buckford had intimidated the bullies of the Hams and the Comets.

Then the traveling man burst into roars of laughter, and stated that Buck was the biggest bluffer to be found anywhere between the two oceans.

"He never got into but one real ring fight in his life, and that was when Shrimp Joyce, a broken-down middle-weight, smashed his nose. Those scars? Ha! ha! ha! Got 'em when he was a kid. Knocked down by another boy



half his size and pounded with a piece of board that had a nail in it. Drink? Sure. He has to. Wouldn't dare say 'boo' to a kid without a double dose of 'Dutch courage,' and he knows it."

All Markville knew the facts in less than an hour. The brutal hero they had worshiped was anything but.

Next day, arriving at the baseball field for practice, Stevens heard sounds of commotion coming from the dressing room, into which he hurried.

There was Mamma's Darling seated astride Old Buck's wishbone, giving him an unmerciful pummeling, while the big fellow bellowed and blubbered like a baby.

The manager pulled the enraged boy off and held him away, sternly demanding to know the meaning of such a performance, while Buckford sat up, wiping his eyes and his bleeding nose.

"He's insulted me and cuffed me round enough," cried Emery. "He tried it once too often to-day, the big stiff, the bluffer! Why, he couldn't whip a sick cat!"

Of course Stevens' efforts to keep the affair quiet were unavailing. The story spread, adding to the mirth of Marktown and putting the Hams and the Comets into form for Old Buck's next appearance. They geyed him unmercifully.

Even the barefooted urchins jeered at him and pelted him with pebbles and bits of half-dried mud.

Old Buck's sun had set. Disheartened and downcast, he came to Stevens at last, and asked for his release.

Nevertheless to this day Stevens feels that he is the one who had the right to laugh last. Old Buck served his purpose, and served it well.

## Trimming the Devil

By Harold C. Burr

When Wall Street springs a new trap for a man there's a story,  
and here it is

YOUNG Brooks Stafford, out at the elbows, out with mankind, his last cent gone, heart gone, paused before the little, barred window in the glass partition, and tapped apologetically.

Had he kept count, he could have told you that he had done precisely the identical thing scores of times during the last week.

He was discouraged and desperate, sick enough to quit, yet fighting gamely on because he was a stickler.

The chase he had kept up for days had been dreary, tiresome, unsuccessful—the pursuit of the elusive job. The eternal grapple to live had him down on his back, almost beaten.

The window before him opened. A young man, wearing glasses, his expression alert, drawn, haggard, dull-blue smears under his eyes, peered out.

Before him was a littered desk, clut-

tered with a great spreading, flat book, the gaudy colors of stock certificates showing here and there; behind him clicking telegraph instruments, jangling telephones, confusion, chaos—the whole making up one of the thousand infinitesimal little cogs in the great wheel of finance.

"Well?" he demanded briskly.

"Is there a vacancy here?" Stafford asked, in a voice rendered singsong by much repetition.

The window banged, rattling the grating.

"Front office," came floating out to the applicant above the hubbub. "See Mr. Vance."

Here was a pale possibility of better things. Brooks had been sent higher up. He went around to the customers' room a little excited, a trifle afraid.

The chairs in front of the black-

board gaped at him emptily; the place was well-nigh deserted. Blackstone, Bradley & Burns catered to outside customers a good deal. Just now the majority of the customers were at lunch. It was no trouble at all to find Mr. Vance.

"Yes," he said, looking Stafford up, down, and sideways, "we do want some one here. You know the Street, I suppose? Could you run a clearing-house sheet?"

Stafford could feel his pulse leap and hammer.

"Try me and see," he said confidently, not boasting. "I was ticket clerk at Gardner and Company's before they dissolved. But they turned me out, and I've been hunting around ever since. Try me and see."

Vance eyed him keenly. He showed the business instinct in his every lithe, eagerly nervous movement. Wall Street is a good place for pushers and hustlers, cool-headed men, and the shabby young stripling before Vance, who spoke so surely, was all of these, and more.

Crude, undeveloped though his abilities were, they were there, powerfully marked in his straight, aggressive chin that had a cleft down the middle. And that was why Vance decided he wanted him for Blackstone, Bradley & Burns.

Stafford went back to his hall bedroom elated and thankful. No one was near enough to him to share his good fortune. His mother was but a dream lady on his memory.

Two years before his father had died, shot down by his own hand, sheared and swindled, a victim of stock-juggling crooks. Like father like son Wall Street had fascinated Brooks, and he had come to New York. But the vast deals of the Street look glittering only from the outside.

Soon the excitement had worn itself off, and Stafford had to steer clear of ruts. But he had never been wholly down and out, and now he had a fresh chance.

There was a girl he knew whose charms were warm, red lips and straight, black eyebrows that looked as

though they had been drawn on with a jet crayon. But he couldn't go to Kitty Dare—yet. So he celebrated quite alone, quite cheaply by turning a handspring over his bed.

He started in at his new position Monday. Vance watched him closely, keeping tab on his strong points, labeling his weak ones for future bracing. He was bound to become a valuable asset some day, a money reaper for the firm.

Blackstone, Bradley & Burns smiled in its sleeve, and waited the time until he could be pushed to the front. And one day the cashier's nasty, hacking cough drove him out to Colorado, and they put Stafford in charge of the "cage," and raised his salary. Then he went to Kitty Dare.

She lived over in Brooklyn, and one evening he went to see her, confident she cared for him.

"Kit," he began, "I'm going to get married. I'm going to marry you."

Miss Dare's straight, young eyebrows leveled.

"You are going to do *what*? Please say that again—slower. But suppose I don't chose to?"

"Bosh!" he scoffed. "I've waited eight years to get my start. I've worked and waited. Why, I—I love you—of all girls."

He saw the dark, shadowy eyes darken and quicken, and he followed fearlessly into the breach.

"Even if you say no, even if you marry some other fellow, I won't give you up—never, never, never. I'll wait for you, and I'll win you."

"You're hurting my hand," she said tremulously.

"Forgive me, dear. I'm—I'm blind—with the light. Speak to me. I'm suffering."

"That's a fine, splendid way to talk," she said softly, her bosom heaving. "A woman loves to hear that kind of—of stuff. Take me for yours—yours to the wire, Brooks."

They were married in the spring. There was no huge affair at a hot, crowded church, no social busybodies to dodge. Just a new suit case and a



two-dollar marriage license, and two weeks' vacation for Brooks.

Back from their honeymoon, they hired a cozy-corner flat, and settled down, contented in the niche the prosperity of the nation had provided for them.

Brooks Stafford went ahead. The time came when they trusted him with big things downtown. But he reached the top a few days after Burns had a talk with Vance.

"We've got to make him a working partner," declared Burns to Blackstone, and Blackstone nodded sagaciously. "We've got to use his name to put this deal through."

They sent for Stafford, and Burns locked himself in with him.

"Brooks," he began, turning his chair back to his desk, his hard glance bent and searching. "Brooks, how long have you been with us?"

"Two years, sir."

"Sit down, my boy. We've been talking about you to Mr. Vance, Brooks. He reports you're a pretty good sort of a worker—on the books. How would you like to branch out?" Burns paused.

"Very much, sir. I want to get loose in the melon patch some day."

Brooks smiled good-naturedly.

"The real good things will come later," he promised indulgently. "But, of course, it may be possible that we can reach no agreement. In that event, I have your word you won't—well, blab?"

"Certainly," replied Brooks, and bowed quietly.

Burns seemed satisfied.

"Good! Now, listen sharp. Have you ever heard of the Riley-Fanshawe gang that controls Seaboard Trunk Line. Well, there's going to be a big split up, shake up—and shake down, too. Fanshawe hasn't sniffed the smoke yet. He won't. Riley's clever that way. He's come to us. Generally we've been on the other side of the barrier, but Riley persuaded us to strike our colors to him."

Burns' smile was masklike, enigmatic.

"Oh, he's clever," he continued. "He wants absolute, practically personal con-

trol of S. T. L. We're his new brokers in the matter—understand? We'll scatter buying orders quietly around. We'll do other things. Riley's got men working for him everywhere to undermine the Fanshawe faction, drive it out of the pool. Fanshawe won't be able to get at the books of the company. Riley's brother-in-law — his president — will smile, dodge, excuse, regret. But Riley wants some one safe to transfer the stock to—why not you? Blackstone, Bradley and Burns is known—may be watched. If Fanshawe once gets his suspicions aroused—bang! We'll lose. But who knows Brooks Stafford? Nobody. Will you—can we use your name?"

Brooks gave back his employer's keen stare with interest.

"You want me to be a figurehead?" he asked shrewdly. "Why not use a dozen—nobodies?"

"That was thought of and abandoned. One man's safer. We don't want too many fingers in the pie. Your reward, Brooks, will be certain shares of the new reorganized company at—nothing."

"I see," nodded Stafford, without excitement. "Well, go ahead."

"Be careful," Burns warned gravely, with the wisdom of years, "and keep your mouth shut."

When Brooks had thanked him and gone, he sat on in his chair.

"That young man," he mused thoughtfully aloud, "knows how to take a chance. In ten years he'll be leading Blackstone, Bradley and Burns around with a ring drawn through our blooming noses!"

Stafford went home with his head in the clouds, his heart in his mouth. The world was spreading out for his conquest. He was grasping big opportunities.

"But how I could soak it to them!" he thought exultingly, feeling his power. "If I called up a certain party on the wire and put him wise! But you can bet Brooks Stafford isn't a fool!"

Kitty met him at the sound of his key in the lock—she always did, and read the good news in his face, even before he told her.

"I'm so glad, Brooks," she said, nestling close to him, running her arm proudly through his. "If Horace only knew, wouldn't he be proud of his great, big papa! Brooks, he—he talked to-day!"

"Get out, Kit! He had the colic."

Together they went to see the baby. The little man was very round and boiling red in the face, and stared at the two enormous creatures who stood over him, and smiled lovingly above his crib, very seriously, very frowningly.

Then he gurgled obscurely, tried to tell them what he thought of existence as far as he had gone, and made a dreadful mess of the whole difficult business.

Kitty looked up at her husband happily. "He's ours, isn't he?" she whispered softly, eyes shining.

"Yes," he said, and stooped and kissed her. "Bless your heart!"

He went downtown in the morning, taking in deep breaths, living. He had misfortune on the hip. But that day he discovered something purely by accident.

It was an old account, closed and balanced, buried, and forgotten. A clerk was poking around one of the green, wooden chests wherein papers and documents, ledgers, and purchase-and-sales books were packed for safe-keeping.

He had piled a miniature mountain of stuff on the rim of the box in question, and the whole, becoming top-heavy, had crashed to the floor. When Stafford had come to the rescue, the evidence was plainly spread before him. He saw a name written across the top of a page—*Joshua Stafford!*

Realization struck him full between the eyes. These men—Blackstone, Bradley & Burns—were the very ones who had trapped and trimmed his father years ago! It was down in the records of the firm in black and white that damned everlastingly.

He was useless for the rest of that working day.

"Kit," he said slowly, too slowly, when he reached home, "I've found out something to-day. They killed dad."

"Who?" she half screamed, startled.

He went fiercely into details, his self-control shaken, new-born hate in his hard, even tone.

"They killed dad," he repeated, when she knew. "The best governor a fellow ever had, the squarest man. Why, Kit, he wouldn't hurt a fly. He wanted to die rich—that was his dream, his harmless dream, and the fever of the Street poisoned his blood. I never knew until to-day who his brokers were. He never peddled his business affairs around. And it was these—these lepers! But I'll rout 'em! I'll rout 'em, because I've got the whip hand."

She, who had never even seen his father, was thinking fast.

"You can't do that, can you?" she asked swiftly. "Won't it mean ruin, oblivion—for us? Can you afford to? Don't decide quickly, Brooks."

"I know, I know," he replied impatiently. "It's a big step to take."

He took her soft, smooth face between his strong, white hands.

"But you don't want me to be a hypocrite," he went on; "you don't want me to live and die a lie; you don't want me to be a weak, spineless traitor to gain a fat purse. What does it profit a man if he lose his own soul, Kit? We'll stand together, honey girl, but we'll stand right, even if it comes to Poverty Alley, won't we?"

And suddenly she understood, could feel as he felt about it, and she sobbed on his shoulder, crying out he mustn't hurt anybody. He could give up his position, leave Wall Street.

They could go off somewhere, and start all over again. She wasn't afraid. She was young and confident and hopeful, and she loved him. That would be his duty, his sacrifice—and hers. But that other course was wicked.

"We'll see," he compromised gently, before bedtime.

But in the morning the road was straighter before him than ever. There were no doubtful twistings and byways, and the end was clearly defined.

Yes, he owed it to his father's sacred memory to strike while the power to destroy was his, and great, good courage coursed through him.

He started for the office early before his wife was awake. No large store of brains was necessary on his part, in his position seriously to cripple Blackstone, Bradley & Burns. There were no complications to work out, or to provide against.

An open switch will wreck a train, and down in Wall Street mistakes are costly, information whispered abroad fatal. Stafford knew accurately well what to do.

The office was, of course, deserted when he got there. Seven o'clock finds the Street sleepily rolling out of bed at home, eating breakfast and reading the morning papers. Brooks, shaking a little at the magnitude of what was on the tapis, locked the door behind him, and set to work.

He went into his cage, took down the call book, and moved the portable phone toward him. He ran his finger down a certain column under the head of Long Island until it rested on the house number of Ralston Fanshawe, man of iron, manipulator of railroads, a power behind the stock-raiding, stock-boosting game.

That was the man he wanted. He lifted the receiver from the hook, and gave the number to central. He had only to inform him. Fanshawe would resent aid in the matter, laugh if he offered it.

His eye fell on a paper that came within his range of vision, a legal-looking, oblong missive, typewriting across its face. It was strange to him, and he speculated idly what it was.

He who waits may read, and that Brooks Stafford did while waiting nervously to get his wire connection. Of a sudden he stifled an exclamation, banged the receiver back in its fork, and caught up the document.

He rushed over to the window where the early morning light was better, and read and read and read, feverishly.

The wording was all of the law, confusing, and dry, replete with repetition, but he got at what it was all about. When he had done, and the paper had fluttered to the carpet from his nerveless fingers, he was surprised and mud-

dled, trembling and uncertain, half doubting even at this stage. But he postponed calling up Ralston Fanshawe.

Stafford could concentrate. Thus it came about that when the office force began to arrive, he had regained his outward coolness and his inward calm. He never blinked when he said good morning to Blackstone, the head of the concern.

"What's this, sir?" he inquired casually, waving the paper that had choked off his telephone message in its infancy.

Blackstone was old, rheumatic, and nearsighted. He peered over his glasses.

"Oh!" he squealed in his queer, piping, rasping voice, "we wanted you to understand about that now that you're sort of one of us. I put it on your desk to remind me—where you could see it. It's been hanging fire for years. He's started some kind of proceedings." His dull, old eyes went green like a snake's, and his purplish upper lip curled back. "But we'll smash him flat, poor fool!"

"Yes," nodded Brooks, the last grain of misgiving swept away. "The name attracted me, gave me quite a start. Same name as mine, same initials as dad's. Thought perhaps it might be a relation or something."

Blackstone came over and patted him paternally on the back.

"Not at all," he squeaked. "This Stafford's a sorehead and a welsher, and we've got to teach him a lesson. He's an old customer living in Jersey, who used to trade in this office. He's not your sort, my boy."

Stafford turned back to his desk. At one side lay the telephone book still open, and, as his eyes fell upon it, it seemed to him that the number, "nine-seven-five Short Branch" stood out clearly from all the rest.

Ralston Fanshawe's house! Brooks closed his eyes a brief second. He thought of the woman who was waiting for him, of the baby, of home—a man's home, every atom of it. Stafford smiled, at ease with his conscience.

"No," he murmured, as he quietly closed the book and put it aside, "I don't think I need that number now."



# Jack Cope, Trooper

By Roy Fessendon

A clinking story of the regular army by an author who knows it from barracks to "officers' row" and from reveille to taps. It is a big, manly story, forcefully told. This section gives you some of the strongest situations of the serial.

## What happened in the preceding chapters.

Jack Cope having been dismissed from West Point for an escapade in which a classmate, Julius Bantry, was equally involved, but who had lied out of it, finds himself down to his last nickel. While walking the streets he rescues a soldier, Sergeant Pat Shannon, of the 99th cavalry, from three highwaymen, and is persuaded by him to enlist.

He does so, and is assigned to Shannon's own troop, the captain of which, Donald Dalton, knew Cope's father, and to whom Jack tells everything that happened at West Point, except, of course, the name of the classmate who lied.

On the way to Fort Galloway, where the 99th is stationed, he has several adventures, and makes two friends, one a young ne'er-do-well, named Alfred Perkins, who has left college and enlisted in a moment of pique, and Jim Kelly, a typical New York tough, but a square chap at heart.

He also makes an enemy of a blustering bully, one Quigley, an ex-prize fighter, who he thrashes; after this fight he meets a young girl, who proves to be Captain Dalton's ward, Florence Vernon, and Cope, at the fort, is ordered to accompany her on her rides about the country, which is unsettled, on account of a strike on the railroad.

On the first of these rides he learns that Julius Bantry is the nephew of Captain Dalton and the stepbrother of Florence. In the course of the ride they top a hill, and in the valley see the mail train pulling into the station, but while they are watching it, it is wrecked by the strikers, and the station set on fire.

Cope knows that the troops will now be ordered out at once, so they immediately set spurs to their horses and race for the fort.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### ACTIVE SERVICE.

**T**OGETHER they raced down the hill and back through the woods, the trees seeming fairly to whistle in the breeze made by the speed of their mounts. They had ridden slowly on

their outbound journey, so really they were not so very far from the post.

Yet, before they reached it, they could hear the bugles, faint in the distance, yet clear and distinct.

"To arms! To arms! To arms!" they sang. "Come quick! Oh, come quickly! Come quickly!"

They both spurred harder than ever.

As they pulled up their panting horses on the edge of the parade ground, they were met by Captain Palmer himself.

"Thank Heaven, you're here, Floss!" he said, with heartfelt earnestness. "I was afraid you wouldn't know—and the country will be full of desperate fugitives very soon. Cope!"

"Yes, sir."

"Ride on the jump to my stable, and change your saddle to one of my horses—the big bay. Leave your own there. Then get your arms and fall in. You'll have time if you hurry."

Jack was off almost before his commander had finished speaking. He lost not a second in transferring his saddle to the back of the captain's powerful bay, but even as he was cinching it he could not help but see, through the stable window, that one of the two troops stationed at Galloway, dismounted, together with a company of infantry, were going down the hill in double time toward the ferryboat which was awaiting them. He saw, too, that the station now was blazing finely, and he heard the irregular popping of shots.

Springing to the back of the fresh and willing horse, he procured the rest of his equipment, and galloped up to his troop on the parade ground just as

it was called to attention. In another instant the troop was in motion.

They went first at a trot, then at a canter. The captain did not want to spend the mounts of his troop more than he could help; he did not know what service they might be called upon to perform before the day should end, and jaded horses at best are a handicap.

So away from the post they jingled, seventy-eight strong. A tuneless little song of joy rose in Jack's mind, keeping time to the thud of his horse's hoofs and the measured rattle of his accouterments. At last he was going on active service—real active service!

Of course it wasn't as though a battle were coming; there would be little or no glory in the duty his troop would be called upon to perform. But there was an excellent chance for a fight, and that was something. He longed to see the troop in action.

The further fact that a man killed in an affray of a sort such as was then liable to occur would be quite as dead as though the killing had taken place in a great battle, never once crossed his mind. And it would have made not the slightest difference in his outlook if it had.

The first few miles seemed very long ones; trees and the conformation of the surrounding country kept their objective point from view. As Jack knew, they would have to wait until they reached the bridge before the opposite shore and the stations once more would be in sight.

This bridge led across the mouth of the little river La Plèche, where it emptied into the larger body of water which lapped the foot of the government reservation. This, though it still bore the name of the river, was in reality an estuary.

A hundred yards before it was reached, Captain Palmer held up his hand. The bugle sounded a single note, and the troop came to a stand.

"Corporal Clancy!" called the captain.

Leaving his place in the column, Corporal Timothy Clancy galloped up to

his superior officer, and, stopping, saluted. A curt order was given to him; what, Jack could not hear. But evidently it pleased the gallant corporal; his face, as he returned to his squad, was marked by a grin so wide as to be almost incredible to one who had not the advantage of actually having seen it.

Indeed, he found difficulty in reducing this grin enough to allow him to give the orders, by which his squad, with Jack among its other members, formed twos, and, leaving the column, went forward at a canter.

Within a few seconds the planks of the bridge were sounding loudly under the drumming hoofs.

Jack's first glance was at the station. They were nearer now, and he could see more plainly. Still, there was not much to be seen as yet. The station itself was a mass of flames.

Smoke, too, was rising from the ruins of the wrecked mail train, and some freight cars were burning. The other troop was debarking from the ferry-boat and forming on the beach.

All this he took in at a glance; he had no time for more. An exclamation from Corporal Clancy brought his eyes closer to their immediate vicinity. Then he saw that from the far abutment of the wooden bridge smoke was curling, and a thin tongue of flame licked upward.

"Squad—halt!" rasped Corporal Tim.

Most reluctantly the squad obeyed, and sat on its horses, trembling with eagerness, to find out what the fire meant, while the corporal, setting his spurs hard, galloped ahead.

Pulling his horse up sharp at the end of the bridge, he leaped to the ground, and the men could see him kicking burning embers into the river. It soon was done, and, motioning the squad ahead, he mounted again.

"'Twas naught but a bit av a foire," he explained, as the others came up. "It hadn't got no fair start. But I thought it moight be dinnymite; that was the r'ason why I wudden't let the rest av ye come."

"It means that some of the enemy

were here a mighty short time ago," remarked Jack.

As he spoke there was a sort of vicious whine in the air overhead, followed almost instantly by the report of a rifle. Jack never before had heard the sound made by a flying bullet, but that is one of the two sounds which experience is not needed to identify. The other is the buzz of a rattlesnake.

"Ut manes thot the inimy is none so far away roight now," replied the corporal, his grin returning in all its pristine glory. "Mebbe we can gather him in, pl'ase the pigs, if we hurry. Far-r-r-d—gallop—*Harrch!*"

The last word did not sound particularly like "march," but the men understood it—and so, for that matter, did the well-trained horses. They had gone but a little way when again the rifle spoke, and again its bullet flew high. So close was the sharpshooter now, concealed among the bushes by the roadside, that the faint puff of vapor made by the smokeless powder that his rifle burned had not time to dissolve before the corporal's sharp, blue eyes discovered it.

Whipping out his pistol, Clancy snapped a shot in return. That it missed immediately became evident; that it flew very close indeed equally so. A man broke cover, and, carrying with him his rifle, began running swiftly across the fields. Another shot from Clancy's pistol threw bits of turf in the air directly behind his flying feet. Clancy looked after him regretfully.

"I can't l'ave the squad. Ye're betther mounted than the l'ave av us, Jack. W'u'd ye loike to take thot man?"

"I sure would!"

"Ye've the legs av him. There's no hurry. Av he thries to get busy with his hardware, rimimber the gun ye wear. But it's a bad shot he is. Well, thin—go to it!"

Not the prosiest sermon that Jack had ever heard seemed so long as the corporal's little speech. It is probable, indeed, that the corporal purposely had made it so. His was a sporting nature, and it would be like him to wish the game to have a good chance.

The last words had not fairly left his lips when Jack, wheeling the captain's horse, put him at the worm fence that bordered the road.

The big bay took it eagerly. There was no need to spur him. He knew, as horses do know, in some mysterious way, that something in the nature of a race was on, and, though its precise nature doubtless was beyond him, he intended to do his part.

So, flattening his ears and stretching forward his beautiful head, he ran for the honor of the army, as fast as he could lay his four powerful legs to the ground.

## CHAPTER XV.

### IN BATTLE ARRAY.

The space between Jack and the fugitive decreased rapidly. At first the thought that it was a human being that he was hunting did not occur to Jack. What this man had attempted was murder, not warfare.

And besides, with the sting of the rushing air in his face, and the feel of those mighty, laboring muscles between his knees, all thoughts save those of the chase were driven from his mind.

Nearer and nearer he drew, until he could see that the fugitive was breathing in gasps, evidently almost spent. Suddenly the man stopped, and turned desperately at bay, the look of a hunted animal in his face.

He threw his rifle to his shoulder. Jack's pistol was in his hand, but he did not fire. Two strides of the great horse, and he was within striking distance. Leaning forward, he brought with all his force the heavy barrel of his Colt down on the man's bare head.

The stiffness seemed to go out of his legs and from his backbone. He wilted, rather than fell, in a crumpled heap, across the rifle that he had not had time to fire. And the big horse thundered on.

By the time he had pulled up and returned to the spot where his captive lay, Jack saw that the troop had come up, and that Captain Palmer was then in the act of taking the worm fence,



with Sergeant Pat Shannon close behind him.

They rode up, and Jack saluted. Returning the salute, the captain dismounted, and, bending over the unconscious man, made a hurried examination.

"Cope," he said, as he straightened, "I understand that this man tried to fire at you."

"Yes, sir. But he didn't."

"That was your good luck; nothing more. It's not your place to wait in order to tap a man on the head when he's trying to kill you. Do you know this man?"

"I! No, sir."

"Do you, sergeant?"

"Faith, I do not, sorr."

"It seems to me that I've seen him before somewhere, but where I can't tell," said the captain slowly, his face puzzled. "Well, we've no time to stop and inquire into that now. Detail a couple of men to guard him. Tell them to get him back to the post when they can, rifle and all."

Still speaking, he mounted and rode toward his troop. The sergeant and Jack, who, as army etiquette requires, had dismounted as he did, saluted, and swung back into their saddles.

"Don't ye moind the capt'in, Jack, me lad," said Sergeant Pat consolingly, as they were galloping back. "I know a man loikes a wurrud av praise whin he does a good thing. But that is not the capt'in's way. Yet he'll not fergit this capture ye made. It'll be heard of, where 'twill do the most good. Ye may go bail fer that, an' niver lose a cent."

There was no time for more words just then; already they were leaping the fence back into the road. Jack's heart leaped with joy. Until that moment it had not occurred to him that he had done anything to be praised for.

And even afterward he had not, in his opinion, done half what Corporal Clancy did when he rode alone toward that fire. To be sure, as things turned out, there had been no "dinnymite," but the corporal did not know that.

Jack's squad had again taken its place in the column, which now was set in motion once more. Another squad now was acting as advance guard, but there was little need for any; the country was open, and one could see for some distance on every side.

The sound of scattering shots came to them from the direction of the station. Jack was fairly startled to note how close they seemed. He did not know quite where they were; the country in that immediate vicinity was strange to him.

A field that bordered the road was fenceless; fresh holes still showed where, until very recently, the posts had stood. Into this the troop rode. The bugle sang an ascending arpeggio of four notes, repeating the last one. The squads of the column turned into line, and at a trot mounted the low hill which then confronted it.

Upon reaching the top, the troop once more was halted, while the captain looked over the situation. The men also could see; as they sat on their horses their heads were just above the crest of the hill.

They found then that they had made a complete circuit of the station, and now had taken up their position in its rear, which lay just at the foot of a gentle slope, a quarter mile away.

On what was now the farther side of the track a breastwork of ties and bags of coal had been erected, and behind it—that is, on the side toward the hill where Jack and his troop were standing—it was packed with men—with far more men than a military leader would have stationed there.

In the space between this barrier and the freight house, too, men were swarming, most of them howling and many running aimlessly to and fro. Nearly all were armed, and there must have been almost if not quite two thousand of them.

In front, the other troop, in extended order, was advancing steadily, without firing, its silence and coolness contrasting strongly with the frenzied, yelling mob it was about to encounter.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## ALFRED PERKINS GETS BUSY.

Corporal Clancy, sitting on his horse, gave forth a little cluck of sympathy.

"Ah-h, luk at thim!" he said, under his breath. "The poor divils—an' the heft av thim honust workin'men at that! But furriners, an' so igner'nt."

"There's an awful lot of men there, though," remarked a trooper—one of the batch that had come into the service with Jack.

"There are not," was the emphatic reply. "Ther's a c'uple av hoondred men maybe in the lot, an' the rest are just hoppin' on wires that these men pull. They don't know what ut manes to go up ag'inst Ooncle Sam. An' the two hundrid are run be foive or six head cranks, what ain't worrk'in'men at all mostly, but just hates riches—whin others has thim—an' discipline wherever found."

"But the two hundred men ought to have sense enough not to go up against Uncle Sam," said Jack, rather astonished at the Irish corporal's philosophy anent the "furriners."

"Sober they would have," Clancy promptly answered. "But luk at thim!"

There was little need to call attention to the fact that but few of the men were sober. Their conduct, even at that distance, made it plain enough. Moreover, men could be seen passing in and out from the freight house with buckets, the contents of which were served, apparently, to all who would take a share. Evidently some shipment of liquor had been broached.

But all this time the other troop was advancing steadily, but slowly, so as to save the wind of the men. Scattering shots were fired at them, but Jack surmised that the intention was to hold the fire, and that these shots were mere evidences of bad discipline. And in this he was right.

The dismounted troop was very close by now. An officer waved his sword, and pointed forward. A bugle sounded, and the soldiers broke into double time.

Then a volley crashed forth. Wild and ill delivered as it was, it could not

be wholly ineffective at that range. Here and there a man fell, and one or two more limped to the rear. For an instant the thin, khaki line hesitated, as well it might, for its rifles, by orders, were empty, and, being cavalry, it carried no bayonets. But it rallied and came bravely on. Captain Palmer turned in his saddle.

"Draw—sabers!" he commanded.

With a swish of steel that made Jack's blood tingle, the sabers flashed in the sun.

"Use the flats, so far as you can, men; don't hurt the poor devils more than you can help," the captain went on. "They'll get all they need from the civil authority when it gets hold of them. Forward—trot—*March!*"

The horses broke into a trot, and the troop passed over the hillcrest. From there on the slope was gently downward. The trot was quickened to a canter; then to a gallop.

Until that time the troop had not been noticed; all had been busy looking at the soldiers who were advancing on the other side. Now some one shouted a hoarse alarm, and a stream of men, in answer to it, came running, halting afterward in the path of the horses. A few desultory shots rang out, but none seemed to be hit.

"Charge!" ordered the captain.

The mounts sprang forward at a run. Quite without realizing what he was doing, Jack found himself yelling at the top of his lungs as he went with the line, curbing his too willing mount slightly so that it should not exceed the pace of the slowest, which necessarily is the pace of the whole.

A few more scattering shots rang out. They were very close now. Jack saw one of the enemy draw back his arm and throw something, as a fielder throws a ball to second—something small and dark, that left a trail of smoke behind it. He knew that it was a bomb. Mechanically he watched it as it flew.

Closer and closer it came; then vanished in a flash of light and a cloud of pearly smoke. A dozen shrieking fragments flew by. A horse on Jack's left

screamed horridly, as only a wounded horse can scream; then rolled over like a shot rabbit, pinning his rider under him.

From the moment of the explosion the men had stopped their yelling as though by word of command. The troop swept on in silence save for the voice of one man, who had been riding next the wounded horse.

"I'll get the brute that threw the bomb if I die for it!" he exclaimed.

And, looking around, Jack saw that it was Alfred Perkins who spoke.

It seemed, however, that Alfred would have but little chance to make good his words. The ill-formed line that had hastily formed to meet the oncoming troop wavered, hesitated, and started to run, each man urged by panic as he saw that his neighbor was about to desert him.

The man who had thrown the bomb led all the rest in flight—and, indeed, he had need to. The troop now was forced from its alignment, for it had met and mixed with the crowd of fugitives, which it helped on its way with much bad language and vigorous blows from the flats of their sabers, for there were far too many to capture. But Perkins forced his way through the mass, his eye fixed on the one man.

Soon he was close, and the man, his wind exhausted, halted and faced about, at bay, his arm drawn back for another throw. Alfred's saber flashed, and the man fell, his shoulder all but cut through.

"There!" said Alfred mildly, and, turning, began to aid his fellows in speeding the fugitives on their way.

"Good work!" called Jack encouragingly; he felt that his protégé was coming on.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE CAPTAIN SPEAKS.

Bugles called the troop back into line. The enemy, now that they had started, was not nearly so hard to handle as they had been. Steadily the crowd was pressed closer and closer to the freight house. Here, reinforced by their fellows, they went more slowly, and,

though no shots were fired, stones, from the back of the crowd, began to fly.

One of these, seen just too late, struck Jack a glancing blow on the head, almost knocking him off his horse. Half stunned for the moment, he involuntarily pulled up, and the troop went on by him.

The fugitives had reached the freight house now, and on its platform made a temporary stand. Once more the bugles spoke their musical message of command, this time saying: "Dismount!" The men swung from their saddles, and, fighting their way to the platform, started to clear it.

Jack's head was clearer now, and even as he urged his horse forward he marveled at the ease with which this was accomplished by his comrades. He marveled still more when, as they gained the platform, a cry was raised, and even what little opposition there was melted instantly. The men composing it broke and ran, not together, as before, but scattered, like the pieces of the bomb that one of them had thrown.

There was something in this that aroused Jack's suspicions. He had the advantage of the bystander's viewpoint; so that when the others simply were standing by, astonished at their easy victory, he could divine its cause.

It was Jack, and Jack only, therefore, who noticed two men, evidently not in the least panic-stricken, who ran together away from the freight house, looking backward as they ran. Stooping they picked up something, and then bending forward ran far faster than before, and ran, not as fugitives run, but as men who have an object.

What that object could be, Jack was unable, for a moment, even to guess. Then a movement, close by the hoofs of his horse, caught his eye. He looked, and saw that it was made by a stout cord, rapidly uncoiling; evidently these men were holding one end. Where the other led, he could only surmise.

But there was no time to stop and think; the coil was almost exhausted. Jack slashed at it with his saber, but it refused to cut so yielding a thing. Only a foot or two was left now.



Dropping his weapon, Jack threw himself headlong from the saddle, grasped the cord with both hands, twisting it around them and rolling, so that it coiled about his body.

Then something struck him, so that the breath was expelled from his body, a firmament of beautiful stars glimmered for the fraction of a second and were gone, and then, for a little, he knew no more.

He came to himself, sputtering and gasping. He had to, or choke, for some one—it was Corporal Clancy—was holding the neck of an upturned canteen to his teeth.

"Thank the good Lord he's oot av it!" he heard Sergeant Shannon say, with heartfelt earnestness. "D'ye feel hurrted much, Jack, me lad?"

"Hurt! No!" gasped Jack. "Wind stamped out of me; that's all. Happens all the time at football. But something bumped my head, too. What was it?"

"'Twas wan av our fri'nds what was thryin' to tear up the railroad here," the sergeant replied, with a chuckle. "A fat wan. He stoombled, an' thin sot down on you—harrd—him not seein' you on account of the horse bein' in the way. An' whin he done ut, yer head hit on a rock. We've arristed him fer interferin' with the formation av the United States Army. Tell me, Jack, lad; do ye set a high value on thot bit av shtring ye're clutchin' there?"

Jack glanced at his hands; which, he found, still were gripped tightly on the cord that he had twisted around them. He smiled as he untwisted the fragment and dropped it.

"I don't think I need it for anything," he replied.

"We wudden't none av us be needin' that nor nothin' else if ye hadn't gripped it, Jack," said Corporal Clancy.

"Thot's no lie," agreed the sergeant. "How did ye know, Jack, that wan ind av thot shtring was fast to a conthrivance made to shpill acid into somethin' what w'u'd set aff eighty pounds av dinnymite under thot freight house?"

"I didn't know," replied Jack, struggling to a sitting position. "I guessed."

"Ye're a mighty good guesser, then. An' a lucky wan fer yerself, if I'm not sore mistaken. This will count fine fer you, later on, me lad. Thim fellers had ut all framed up from the shtart to get us into the freight house or onto the platform an' thin turn her loose. Ye've saved the lives av pretty much the whole throop. D'ye think ye c'u'd stand now?"

Jack answered that question by scrambling to his feet and standing unassisted, though still a trifle unsteadily. As he did so, the captain, dismounted, walked quickly up to him.

"Cope," he said to the new trooper, as the latter saluted, "you've done well to-day. Very well. Your conduct shan't be forgotten. Can you sit on your horse?"

"Yes, sir; there's nothing the matter with me now."

"Good. Then mount and go back to the post with the squad I'm sending by Sergeant Shannon to guard some prisoners. You won't be needed for duty again to-day."

Turning, he strode away, leaving the two noncommissioned officers almost speechless with amazement. As his form lessened in the distance, Sergeant Pat drew a long sigh, and turned to Cope.

"Jack," he said impressively, "niver in me loife did I hear the capt'in give a man the good worrd as he did you just now. Always before he has let a man guess that he was pleased. Faith, ut wudden't surprise me afther thot to hear ter-morrer marnin' that ye've been made a major giner'l, begob!"

Jack laughed; but, shaking his head to show that he considered the matter far too serious to laugh at, Sergeant Shannon went away to muster his prisoner's guard.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### POST GUARD.

It was slow work riding around the farm wagon that had hastily been secured to transport the prisoners to Fort Galloway. Moreover, Jack's whole body ached, and his seat in the saddle

was far less firm than usual. Yet his heart was light, and the way did not seem long.

For though he might laugh at the old sergeant's astonishment, Jack had learned enough of his taciturn old chief to value his rare words of praise at their true value, which was far above that which justly could be given them had they been uttered by another man.

Almost, so great was his feeling of good will toward all at that moment, was Jack inclined to wish that the sullen prisoners, some of them wounded by blows of blunt weapons—the back of a saber, or the heelplate of a rifle, for example—that the prisoners, sitting glowering in that jolting wagon, might somehow go scot-free, so that he would not have to help deliver them to the guardhouse, whence, as well he knew, they would emerge only to go through a Federal court to one of the prisons.

The prisoners were delivered, however, without incident. Afterward Jack forced his aching body to attend to his own horse and that of Captain Palmer, which he had ridden. Then, without waiting for supper, he tumbled gratefully into his bunk, and there fell fast asleep.

Next morning he was awakened by Sergeant Shannon's hand on his shoulder.

"Are ye awake?" he asked; then, as he saw Jack's eyes open, he went on: "Reveille sounds in a minut, Jack, an' I was to tell ye thot ye needn't get up if ye don't feel fit. How are ye, annyhow?"

Tentatively Jack moved his arms and legs, and found, as might have been expected, that the movement gave him exquisite pain.

"I feel like the first day of football practice," said he, with a smile. "I'm as sore as a pup that has tried to lick a thrashing machine. But it's only exercise that'll cure that sort of soreness. I'll get up, sergeant."

"Good!" grunted Sergeant Pat. "I knowed ye w'u'd, av ye c'u'd stand on yer two feet. And it's needin' ivery man we are this blessed day."

With this praise on his lips—as un-

usual, in its way, as was that of the captain he adored, the sergeant turned away to attend to his duties, and, rising, Jack proceeded to dress.

It was hard work. Jack almost listened to hear his joints creaking, they worked so stiffly. But the task became easier as it went on, and by the time it was finished Jack found that he could walk, by trying hard, in something approaching a normal manner.

He found, after an unusually hasty breakfast had been eaten, that what Sergeant Shannon had said was indeed true; every man was needed—and far more, had there been more available.

Parties were sent out to patrol the surrounding country, in the immediate vicinity of the line, to see that the latter was not interfered with. There were guards to be placed over necessary rolling stock and equipment; also over the workmen who had come to repair the line and clear away the wreck.

Two battalions of infantry and a battery of field artillery had been ordered to Fort Galloway, it was said among the men, but it would take two days to get them there.

Until the reënforcements should arrive, all duty, and the regular post guard besides, fell on the two troops. To this latter service, much to his disappointment, Jack found himself detailed.

The parties told off for outside work rode away, morning "stables" was over, and so was the beautiful old ceremony of guard mount. Jack, dismounted, and with his rifle over his shoulder, found himself pacing Post No. 3.

One end of this beat rested on the walk before Officers' Row; the other, meeting the limit of No. 4, rested almost on the guardhouse. The beats were very long that day, for the number of posts had been reduced.

No soldier likes the monotonous duty of a sentry, and to Jack it was more than usually irksome that morning. He felt that fortune had played him a mean trick to keep him pacing up and down, dismounted, when so many of his comrades were on their horses, with a chance of some excitement. Then something happened.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## QUIGLEY TAKES A HAND.

Jack was pacing toward the upper end of his beat when Florence Vernon, clad in the freshest of morning gowns, came tripping along Officers' Row. As discipline and the regulations prescribe, Jack never turned his head. Florence stopped squarely before him.

"Good morning, Mr. Cope," she said.

"Good morning, Miss Vernon," he replied, half facing about, and bringing his rifle smartly to a "port." After all, Jack was only human.

"Do you know," she went on, "I've been hearing Uncle Donald saying all sorts of nice things about you."

Jack was pleased naturally—greatly pleased. But he knew that this praise, whatever it might have been, was not intended for his ears, and he knew that this young girl, innocently enough, was in fact breaking a confidence.

"I'm awfully glad," he said, laughing. "Yet I very much doubt if you'd hear any more, if he knew you'd told me."

"Do you mean to say I've been telling tales out of school?" she demanded, coloring.

"Haven't you?" he asked in return, still laughing, and with a bantering air. "About the time when you revealed the fact that the captain and all the rest saw the little unpleasantness I had with Quigley, for example—no one was supposed to know that they had the faintest notion it was going on."

For a moment she appeared undecided whether or not to be offended, but ended by laughing also.

"Well, I suppose all this pretense may be necessary from a military point of view," she said, "but I can't see it. It seems just silly to me. And so does the fact that Uncle Donald won't let me go riding any more now. He says it's dangerous."

"And so it is," said Jack. "We scattered an awful lot of bad characters about the country, because we hadn't enough men to capture them. You can't tell where they're hiding now, nor what they might do if they were to meet you.

Captain Palmer is quite right. He always is, it seems to me."

She pouted a little, but made no direct reply, changing the subject instead.

"You say you couldn't capture many of those awful men, but you did take some of them, I know. Where are they now?"

"Guardhouse and hospital—about equally divided."

"And that horrid beast who threw the bomb—is he among them?"

"He is. Hospital. Saber cut."

"Good!" she cried, her eyes glistening. "Who gave it to him?"

"Perkins, a trooper. You've seen him; he was one of the men who seconded me in my fight. He's on the next post—Number Four, the one in front of the guardhouse—now," replied Jack, eager that Alfred's feat should become known to his superiors. For he was sure that Florence would see that it did. "Why are you so especially pleased?"

"Because he killed that horse—that lovely horse," she answered, her eyes filling. "He was the one I always rode—don't you remember? And I'd have the man *hung* for it if I could," she ended vindictively.

"I'm awfully sorry—*awfully*," began Jack sympathetically; then stopped short.

From the direction of the guardhouse there came a confused sound, as of struggling, and men swearing in undertones. He saw Alfred Perkins running at top speed for the door. As he reached it five men rushed out. Three of them, prisoners taken at the station on the previous day, were unknown to Jack. A fourth was the man he himself had taken on the way out; the remaining one was Quigley.

Alfred started to shout, and would have fired his rifle, but before he could do either the weapon was wrenched from his grasp, and a leg wrenched from a table, and, wielded by Quigley's powerful arm, fell heavily across his temple. He dropped like a felled ox. Carrying his rifle with them, and keeping well together, the little crowd of fugitives started to run. Jack's rifle



was at his shoulder instantly, as he sprang between Florence and the fleeing men.

"Run! Run to the house! Quick!" he begged, over his shoulder, but she did not stir.

"Halt!" he called aloud. "Halt, or I fire!"

There was no pause on the part of the fugitives. Jack's rifle spoke as soon as the last word had left his lips. The prisoner he had taken, who carried Alfred's rifle, fell headlong, a bullet through his thigh, the rifle falling beyond him as he went down.

Two men, one of them Quigley, made a dive for it. The other man grasped it and fell as Jack fired a second time. Quigley had the piece now. A third bullet missed him, for he darted quickly to one side, thus uncovering Florence from the shelter of Jack's protecting body.

"Raise that gun again, and I'll kill her!" he cried, leveling the piece.

By way of answer, Jack sprang once more between the girl and the weapon that threatened her. The two rifles spoke with one report. Something like the blow from a club struck Jack's shoulder. Things began to grow strangely unsteady. He saw Quigley, apparently high in the air, throw up his arms and fall; he saw that the remaining two prisoners had halted, and that the guard, at a run, was coming from the guardhouse, and dimly he heard shouts. Then he went, quite simply and naturally, as it appeared to him, to sleep.

## CHAPTER XX.

### IN HOSPITAL.

"Well, young man, have you decided to wake up?"

"Yes, sir," replied Jack, weakly but respectfully. For it was old Doctor Clarke, the post surgeon, who spoke. Jack had just opened his eyes to find the gruff, kindly old doctor seated beside his cot, by which token he realized that he was in the post hospital.

Then came back to him what had happened, and, putting a feeble hand to his shoulder, he discovered that this

part of his person was swathed in bandages. He started to ask a question, but the old surgeon stopped him.

"Drink this, and don't try to talk," he commanded. "I'll tell you most of what you want to know afterward."

"This" proved to be a cup of chicken broth. It was long since Jack had tasted anything like that, and he did not find it at all hard to obey the doctor in this respect.

"Good?" grinned the doctor, as Jack finished and an orderly carried away the empty cup. "Well, it ought to be; it came direct from the captain's quarters. You're a lucky man, my lad—except that you seem to get in the way of anything flying about that can hit you. It isn't often, in what are supposed to be times of peace, that a soldier gets knocked silly and has a hole put in his hide in two consecutive days. But I'm not at all sure that this fact isn't part of your good luck, the way things run."

"Those men—did they recapture them?" asked Jack.

"Shut up," the doctor replied. "I was coming to that. Yes. They're all in the hospital now. The guard was what you might call harsh with the two you left unwounded. That was good shooting of yours. Specially on Quigley. He'll probably die, and a good job, too. Of course, I'll do all I can to prevent it, but I'm none too anxious to succeed."

"Now you lie quiet; that's all you have to do. Wait till your body can make more blood in place of that which was spilled, and you'll be on horseback before you know where you are."

He started to go, but a feeble hail from Jack stopped him.

"Well—what is it?" he asked.

"How's Perkins, sir?"

The genial smile faded from the doctor's face.

"He may recover. I hope he will. But, if he doesn't, and that man Quigley does, he—Quigley—will dance on nothing, just as sure as the devil wears petticoats!"

The doctor was a bachelor of a confirmed and what might be called a

bigoted type. Had it not been for Jack's concern about poor Perkins, he would have smiled at this fresh evidence of the fact as the old man stumped out of the room.

The interview had tired Jack, who was far weaker than he realized, and it was with a sense of placid comfort that he settled back on his pillows and closed his eyes, while he felt against his body the unaccustomed luxury of sheets.

Day after day this contented lassitude continued, mingled with the smart and almost unbearable itching of his healing wound. But each of these days brought to his healthy body an appreciable addition of strength. Before many of them had passed, Captain Palmer came one morning and sat down beside Jack's cot.

"I'm glad to say that the surgeon tells me you're coming on very nicely, Cope," he said. "In fact, he's quite astonished at the progress you've made. Is there anything you want? Is the food all right?"

"More than all right, sir. I'd no notion it ever could be so good in an army hospital. I only wish the doctor would let me eat more. I'm hungry enough all the time to have a try at a horse, if one were served to me."

"I'm glad to hear that; it's a good sign," replied the captain, smiling. "Still, I don't think we'll let you begin on the horses yet a while. I doubt if the doctor would approve—and we need our mounts, anyhow. But I'm pleased to hear that the food is satisfactory, so far as the doctor will let you have it."

He had a personal reason for this satisfaction that Jack did not then know. Not only that first meal, but every morsel that he had eaten had been prepared by the captain's own cook, and sent from his quarters to the hospital. The captain rose.

"I wish to say that your conduct the other day was such as your father would heartily have approved of," he said. "Not so much on account of its bravery; he would have expected that as a matter of course. It was your quickness of thought in interposing your

own body to shield that of a helpless young woman, while not allowing her helplessness to hinder you in the performance of your duty, that would have pleased him. Doubtless he knows and is pleased, where he is."

"Is Miss Vernon quite well?" Jack summoned courage enough to ask.

"Quite. She sent by me her best wishes for your quick recovery. I hear, too, the best news of Perkins this morning. The doctor says that, if no ill fortune intervenes, he's on the right path now."

"And Quigley, sir—have you heard of him?"

"I have. I fear he may recover also. Do what the doctor tells you, Cope, and we'll have you around in no time. I must go now."

Jack obeyed, and soon the doctor allowed him more food to satisfy that ravenous appetite of his, and he was allowed to sit up for a little each day. Then it was that he began to grow restless. But it was not long before he was permitted to dress and walk in moderation about the post.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### JACK REMEMBERS.

It was a far different post from the one that Jack last had seen. The infantry and field artillery had come, and the place hummed with life as it had not done before.

Leaning on his stick, Jack regarded the change with deep approval, and watched with envy the parties of the former two arms of the service as they departed for their work outside the post.

Then it was that Jack learned, in answer to his eager inquiries, how the outside affairs were going.

All was quiet along the railway, he was told, but it seemed rather an ominous quiet. A large force of the more desperate men had gathered in the hills, back of the town, and, it was said, had intrenched themselves there, near an abandoned mine, to which a spur led from the railway's main line.

The civil authorities seemed quite un-

able to displace them. Nor, indeed, were they very anxious to do so; the malcontents were safer there in their stronghold, keeping out of other mischief by hurling verbal defiance at the said authorities, than they would be elsewhere.

He had just acquired this information, and was sitting in the shade of the quartermaster's stores, digesting it, when Sergeant Shannon came by, and stopped upon seeing him.

Having asked and received a full account of Jack's health, the old sergeant seated himself on the bench beside him, and, extracting from his pockets a pipe and pouch, proceeded to fill the former and get it going.

"I just come from the prison warrd av the hospital, Jack, me lad," said he. "The captain sent me there. He wanted me to see if I could tell who was the lad ye biffed over the nut wit' the flat av yer sword the other day. The captin feels sure he's seen him somewhere, but he can't tell where."

"I know," replied Jack. "And, strangely enough, I feel the same way."

"The divil ye say!" exclaimed the sergeant. "Is that straight, Jack, or are ye joshin'?"

"Joshing! Why should I josh?" asked Jack, astonished in his turn at the other's surprise. "I'm sure I've seen him somewhere before. I felt the same way about Quigley when I met him there in the train. Why did you ask whether I was in earnest or not?"

"I asked," said the sergeant slowly, "becus I feel the very same way, and about the very same man, at that. It's blazin' queer. Somehow I can't seem to get it t'rough me nut at all."

Certainly the puzzled expression on Sergeant Pat's honest face fully bore out his last statement. Yet, as Jack glanced at that face, something flashed across his mind. Forgetting his weakened state, he sprang to his feet.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. Sergeant Pat looked up anxiously.

"Is anything wrong?" he asked solicitously. "Are ye feelin' bad ag'in, Jack?"

"Wrong! No. But it just occurred

to me, when I looked at your face while thinking of Quigley and that other man, where it was I'd seen them before, that's all."

"The divil ye say! Where was ut?"

"Do you remember the men who attacked you outside that measly little restaurant the night we first met?"

"Do I! Is it likely I'd fergit ut? What thin?"

"Quigley and the chap I gathered in were two of those men. I'd swear to it before any court in Christendom."

"Begob, ye're roight!" cried the sergeant, and, rising from the bench, began to pace up and down, now nearly as excited as Jack had been. "Ye're dead roight! I'd swear to ut mesilf. But—but, Jack," he went on, halting.

"Well?"

"How does that let the capt'in in? You an' me knowin' thim fer the men what we licked whin they wint fer me? The capt'in wasn't with us—more's the pity!"

He sat down again on the bench to solve, if he could, this new complication, but neither he nor Jack could even guess at the answer, and, at last, they reluctantly gave it up. The sergeant rose with a sigh.

"Well, if it's beyond your head to answer the question, Jack, I may as well give ut up," said he. "Maybe the capt'in himself will remimber whin wance I give him the start be tellin' him what you remimbered. I'll go tell him now."

He started away, but stopped and returned.

"I all but fergot to tell you, Jack," he said. "The capt'in said fer me to tell you whin I saw you that if you felt well enough to set in a saddle, he'd be glad if you'd go out wit' Miss Florence again. You was to take that old Aladdin harse av his."

## CHAPTER XXII.

### AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

At Sergeant Shannon's last speech the question of where the captain had previously seen Jack's prisoner vanished utterly from Jack's mind. As a matter of fact, he was not by any means fit to



ride, but under the circumstances he would cheerfully have mounted the veriest outlaw that ever disgraced the service, not to mention Aladdin, Captain Palmer's favorite charger, now practically retired, who was gentler, wiser—and older, too, for that matter—than many of the men.

So he reported his readiness to the captain, received his congratulations for his marvelously quick recovery, and that afternoon, after coaxing a good-natured comrade into saddling Aladdin for him, with difficulty hoisted himself into the saddle, and with joy in his heart once more rode out after Florence Vernon's gingery, little bay mare.

They had gone but a little way from the post when Florence, according to the custom which she had established for herself, called him to her side.

"Have you heard the news—the good news?" she asked, as soon as a searching series of questions concerning Jack's illness and present state of health had been put and answered. "I know you can't have, though. I myself only got word this morning."

"What is it?" asked Jack, smiling sympathetically.

"It's about Julius—Julius Bantry, you know. You'd heard that he'd left the academy, hadn't you?"

"No, I hadn't heard," replied Jack dryly.

Now, Jack never had admitted to Florence that he had known Julius Bantry. Therefore, by the fact that she assumed that such an acquaintanceship existed, some one—presumably Captain Palmer—had told her that he, Jack, had formerly been a cadet.

From the further fact that she made no direct mention of this, he guessed that she had been told not to tell him of her knowledge. So he gave no sign of having surmised it.

The fact that Bantry had left the academy, however, did not greatly surprise him. And, while his leaving certainly was good news—for the academy—Jack hardly expected the girl to regard it in that light.

"Why did Bantry leave?" he asked, with some curiosity.

"His health gave out. Quite suddenly. And the other boys of his class were perfectly horrid in the way they treated him; I can't imagine why. But now he's quite recovered, and mother—she isn't my mother really, you know, though she is his—mother wrote to a lot of senators and congressmen and things she knows, and now he's got his commission months and months ahead of his class. Isn't that lovely?"

Jack did not think so in the least, but he hesitated to state that fact just then.

"Isn't it a little bit rough on the rest of the class?" he asked gently.

"I don't see that it is," she answered hotly. "They'll get their commissions at the same time they always expected them, won't they? So why should they grudge him his good fortune?"

Jack could think of many reasons, but he gave only one.

"Well, of course, it'll set a lot of fellows back on the list one number, you see," he said mildly. "That is, you know, they wouldn't have the seniority they otherwise would. No man likes that."

"I don't see why all you men are so small and envious," Florence pouted. "All the officers to whom I mentioned this good luck of poor Julius showed they didn't like it. Even Uncle Donald—his own uncle. I was surprised at him more than any of the others."

"What did he say?"

"Very little. Just that he was sorry to have a member of his family enter the service in such a way. But he closed his mouth very tight, and I know what that means. It's very odd, but sometimes I think that really Uncle Donald isn't very fond of Julius—doesn't really like him. And Uncle Donald isn't a narrow-minded man. I can't understand it."

She puckered up her face, evidently studying the problem. Jack, who was not particularly astonished by what he had heard, and who could have given a perfectly adequate reason for Captain Palmer's attitude toward his nephew, said nothing.

For some time they rode along in silence, which at last was broken by the

hoofbeats of a galloping horse, coming up behind them. Glancing around casually, he noted that the horse was ridden by an officer, as he could tell by the leather leggings—the only way one could tell an officer from an enlisted man at that distance. But the fact did not interest him, and he turned again to the girl riding by his side.

He was about to speak; but, as he saw her face, he checked himself in astonishment. She was smiling, and her eyes shining with joy.

"Oh, *look* who's here!" she cried. "Talk of an *angel*—"

She interrupted herself by sending home her little, spurred heel, and riding at top speed toward the newcomer, now momentarily concealed by a clump of trees. Still sadly puzzled, Jack followed her as in duty bound. Her last words were in no way enlightening. She had not been talking of anything remotely resembling an angel, so far as Jack could recollect.

Very soon, indeed, at the pace they were going, the mounted officer met them, and then Jack was puzzled no longer. The officer was Julius Bantry.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### JACK SCORES.

For a moment Jack could scarcely believe his eyes. But it certainly was Bantry; and with a captain's bars on his shoulders. But, as Jack instantly noticed, not with the insignia of any of the three fighting arms of the service on his collar. That bore a crescent, the mark of the Subsistence Department—the Commissary.

"Julius!" cried Florence, reining her horse short beside him. "Why, *when* did you come? Are you to be here, at Fort Galloway? How lovely! But how did it happen that we heard nothing of it before?"

And before Julius could answer any of these questions, she had leaned from her saddle, and kissed him.

This was almost more than Jack could bear. To see her kiss this man whom he knew for a liar and sneak was enough in itself. But, in addition, Julius was

in the uniform of an officer, while Jack wore the garb of the ordinary trooper that he was—and it was through the fault of Julius that this was so.

And that this man should be sent to Fort Galloway, of all the posts in the United States and out of them, seemed a freak of fate that was nothing less than wantonly cruel.

It was all that Jack could do to sit straight in his saddle and come to the regulation salute. But he had learned self-control, among many other useful things, since he had entered the army, and, though it cost him a mighty effort, and left his face pale as death, he managed it.

Julius glanced at him, gave a little start of astonishment, and then, sneering, answered the salute.

"I got here this morning," he replied, returning Florence's kiss in a perfunctory manner. "The wires were down, so no telegrams could come through, and I accompanied the advices that were sent by mail, I suppose. Hunt—he's in the cavalry now—came out with me. You remember Hunt, of course, Flo."

"Yes; I remember him," she replied, with a notable lack of enthusiasm.

Jack also remembered Horace Hunt, graduated from West Point the year before. Twice had Hunt been on the ragged edge of expulsion, both times for questionable transactions in which money and other and younger cadets were concerned; Jack never had learned the exact details of the cases. And both times he had been saved by some influence at Washington, which had prevented the findings of the court-martial which had tried him being approved.

Like every other man with the good of the army at heart, Jack always had hated the political influence which, forever interfering with its discipline and morals, is, and has for many years, been its bane. Now he cursed it in his mind with renewed enthusiasm.

"I know you'll be glad to see old Hunt," Bantry went on, disregarding Florence's lukewarm acceptance of the news of that individual's advent. "He was wild to come, when he heard you were here, and worked every pull he

knew to get the billet. I rode out here hoping to meet you, Flo; I want to talk with you. Cope!"

"Sir," answered Jack, saluting. He would infinitely rather have had a tooth pulled.

"I will accompany Miss Vernon the rest of the way. You may ride back to the post."

Inwardly Jack gloated.

"Captain Bantry's pardon. I was detailed by Captain Palmer to accompany Miss Vernon until she should reach home."

The face of Julius flushed. He lost his temper—and, for the time, his head.

"Well, I relieve you of that detail," he cried. "Go back—and at once! Do you hear?"

"I hear, sir. Am I relieved by Captain Palmer's orders?"

"You are relieved by my orders. Will you obey them or not?" thundered Julius.

"I think not, sir. The orders of Captain Palmer take precedence."

And Jack, his face expressionless but with his soul singing little hymns of thankfulness for the chance of thus setting his enemy's new-found authority at naught, sat back in his saddle and lapsed into silence.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### AN ATTACK.

Julius knew perfectly that he had been betrayed into exceeding his authority in his desire to humiliate the man whom he had injured. And the knowledge that he had thus succeeded in making an ass of himself did not, in the least, tend to lessen his anger. From red he turned white, and for a moment could find no words; but, at last, with a mighty effort, he partially controlled himself.

"You're insolent!" he growled. "Insubordinate, as well. I don't allow that sort of thing, as you'll find out, to your cost. We'll ride on now. Take distance behind—and see that the distance is great enough so that your long ears won't overhear my conversation with Miss Vernon. Do you understand?"

It was Jack's turn to be angry now, but he had the great, good sense to say nothing. Instead he saluted again, and reined back as the other two rode on—Florence giving him a sympathetic little glance over her shoulder as she did so, which went far toward comforting him.

They retraced the path already traveled twice that day by Florence and Jack, and, as soon as they had gone far enough, Jack put his horse in motion, at a footpace, so that he should not overtake them.

From time to time the windings of the woodland road concealed them; at others, they could plainly be seen. In no case, of course, would Jack have needed the admonition to keep out of earshot, but now he was more than usually particular, and allowed a hundred yards or more to intervene between old Aladdin and the horses they were riding.

There was no rule, of honor or otherwise, however, to compel Jack to keep his eyes off the couple, and, without quite realizing it, he looked at little else.

He could only see their backs, of course, but sometimes backs are expressive. It was so in this case. It became as evident as though he could hear what was said.

Julius Bantry was urging her in some way. Evidently whatever he wished was strongly against her inclinations. First she was hurt, afterward angry, and finally stubborn. At this Julius became angry, and his voice rose, though at first his words did not reach the ears of Jack, even at the distance he had maintained behind them.

A bend in the woodland road concealed them. Just beyond, this road, as Jack well knew, was crossed by a much-traveled highway. He did not know, however, that they had stopped at the crossing, and that, therefore, he had drawn much nearer them than he had been. He was made aware of this by hearing the voice of Julius once more raised in anger.

"Haven't you *any* regard for my future?" he shouted. "For my future's in the balance—and so I tell you frankly!"



The reply—even the sound of Florence's voice—was inaudible.

"But you gave your word once. I depended on that, and so did he. And now you've got to keep it! I know I've been a little wild. So is every other man, worth the name. But that doesn't absolve you from your word. And you'll keep it—understand? You'll keep it, or I'll know the reason why!"

The reply again was inaudible; but, to Jack's great delight he saw, as he came around the curve, that the set of Florence's shoulders indicated a degree of obstinacy such as a woman can show on occasion, when some one is trying to drive her.

And, though he had not the slightest notion of what the argument had been about, he was sure that she was in the right of it, and his sympathies were with her thoroughly—as they probably would have been, for that matter, whether she was right or wrong.

"You won't!" shouted Julius, in rejoinder to her last reply. "Then I wash my hands of the whole affair. I'll take the consequences—and you can share the disgrace!"

As Julius spoke—almost, indeed, as though in answer to his words—a motor car, coming at a moderate speed down the highway, stopped suddenly. Four men occupied the seats. Two of them raised their hands above the tonneau, and Jack saw that each of them contained a long-barreled, blue pistol. Even

at that distance, he could swear to both make and caliber.

"Hands up!" cried one.

Dropping his reins, Julius promptly did as he was told. Florence, using curb and spur, started to swing her mount around on its hind legs. Two shots rang out, and, with a scream, the mare fell dead, pinning the girl under her.

It all had taken place in a second. Jack's muscles had acted before his brain had time consciously to direct them, and a shot from his pistol cracked promptly, though never afterward was he able to remember drawing the weapon.

Aladdin, to whom the sound of a shot was as exciting as it is to an old and experienced setter, chose that instant to prance, and the bullet flew wild. Before he could fire again, Julius had turned his horse, and, leaning far over its withers, was spurring frantically away, riding in line between Jack and the car.

"Ride back!" he shrieked to Jack. "Ride back to the post, and turn out men to recapture her! Can't you see they've got her? Ride back, I say!"

TO BE CONTINUED.

*The next section of this serial will appear in the June TOP-NOTCH, out May 1st. Back numbers may be had of news dealers or the publishers at any time.*

### A Quick Decision

AT a police court recently a man was brought up for being "drunk and disorderly."

The Magistrate—"What did you want to get drunk for?"

Prisoner—"Oh, it was only for a lark!"

"Oh," answered the magistrate smilingly. "We have cages for larks; go in one for fourteen days."

### In Need of a Chaser

HOSTESS—"Won't you sing something for us, Miss Skremer?"

Miss Skremer—"Why—er—most of the guests have gone home, have they not?"

Hostess—"Yes; but some of them seem inclined to stay here all night."

# The Wrath of Robin

By Elmore Elliot Peake

A moving tale of Western roughing—a phase of the life that tries men's characters and tests their hearts. As an example of what a hard bump may do for the hardest man this story is remarkable.

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

## CHAPTER I.

### A CAUSE OF DELAY.

THE prairie schooner was moored among the cottonwoods which fringed the bank of the river. There was no other shade for miles—nothing but the quivering, sunburnt Oklahoman plain, overhung with a dun cloud of dust kicked up by a multitude of hoofs from the homesteaders' trail.

The schooner in question, however, seemed becalmed. The master, as shaggy as a bison, sprawled on the grass, snoring raucously. Near the entrance to a weather-beaten dog tent a young woman sat sewing.

From her girlish figure and peculiarly spiritual face, no one would have suspected her to be the wife of the sot in the grass. Yet he was fifteen years younger than he looked, and she was older than she looked, and the boy who sat at her feet was their child.

He was writing, slowly and laboriously, with intervals spent in gazing into the fleecy sky through dreamy eyes.

"Mother, I've wrote all I can think of," he said finally.

"*Written*," she corrected, biting off a thread. "Read it to me, Robin."

He cleared his throat, frowned at the haphazard characters, and began:

DEAR GRANDPA: We have moved from Como to Prairie City. We have been here a month. It is quite a nice place. We left Como because we got there too late for the drawin' of lots. Father is lookin' around here. Mother would love to see you all. So would I. We met some people from Ohio. We felt like we knew them because they were Buckeyes, too. Your loving grandson,

ROBIN SALE.

Silence followed, punctured only by the chitter of the grasshopper horde.

Then the boy, noticing his mother's damp lashes, spoke up earnestly:

"Mother, why don't you let me tell grandpa that we reached Como too late because father got blind drunk at Guthrie? Then he'd send us money, and you and me could go home."

"And leave your father alone out here?"

"Yes," he answered, with a fierceness which half took her breath. "I hate him for gittin' drunk all the time and whippin' me for nothin'. Mother"—he looked up with thin, set lips and smoldering eyes—"I'll whip him harder'n he's ever whipped me when I'm twenty-one."

The mother drew his hot face to her breast and kissed his tousled hair, and thus they sat for some minutes.

Presently the elder Sale rose, stretched, and yawned. At once, though unobtrusively, Robin picked up a fish pole and slipped away.

The father eyed the vanishing figure disapprovingly, as if scenting the motive. But he said nothing, and, leaning against a wagon wheel, he gazed across the torrid expanse of plain to the tents, sod huts, and raw frame buildings which constituted the half-year-old Prairie City.

In spite of his rough clothes and neglected person, his shapely hands, frank eyes, and high brow suggested a past far removed from this repulsive present.

"Prairie City!" he muttered, with ineffable scorn. "The Southwestern metropolis of the future, here in the

Land of Men, on one of the richest soils in the world, under a sky of Neapolitan hue!" He laughed bitterly, and added, as if to himself: "I wouldn't give one acre of old Miami bottomland for this whole accursed, sun-scorched, grasshopper paradise."

He was silent for an interval, and then asked, without turning his head:

"You know what day this is, Marsh?"

"Yes—the fourteenth of June."

"I guess you forgot it was my birthday, didn't you? You should have given me a little party, Marsh, and invited the grasshoppers in. Thirty-nine! Thirty-nine years ago to-day my dear old mother, then a girl of twenty-two, made her first descent into that shadowy vale where mothers find their babes—a little sober, perhaps a little fearful, yet assuredly happy."

He paused, and his eyes blurred with tears.

"Eighteen years ago this month I was graduated from Princeton. Fifteen years ago I was admitted to the bar. Twelve years ago I married you. Ten years ago I became a father. And, to conclude the chronology, two hours ago I was riding like mad into yonder town for a bottle of whisky—a boozier, a tramp, stranded in a God-forsaken country, with a wife living like a gypsy and a child that hates me."

"Not that, Horace!" observed Marcia quickly.

"Just that!" he retorted savagely. "Why shouldn't he hate me? I *am* a devil. Whisky has made me one. And it will make me a worse one yet—if that's possible. I tell you, Marsh, *I—can't—stop—drinking!* I love it better than anything on earth—better than honor, riches—better than *you*; and I shall die with the fumes of the poisonous man-killer on my lips."

## CHAPTER II.

### A FAMILY JAR.

Horace swung toward her with an inflamed, malevolent eye—the eye of a man not quite sane for the moment.

Marcia was not afraid; but Robin, who had gone no farther than the

bushes skirting the camp, shook for his mother's safety.

"Horace," said she, gently but firmly, "if you speak your honest conviction, you might better die to-night."

"Ah!" he fltered. "Perhaps you are thinking of mixing me a dose of poison for supper!"

He advanced a step or two threateningly.

The next instant Robin burst from his hiding place and confronted the man.

"Don't you touch my mother!" shouted the boy, and in his excitement he lifted his fish pole and gave his father a cut across the face.

Salé, with a cry of fury, seized the child and thrashed him soundly.

But no cry escaped the boy's set teeth, no weak tear wet his eye, and as soon as he was released he ran to a safe distance, and called back tauntingly:

"Mother's right! I wish you'd die to-night, too, you old—you old soak!"

It was midnight when he stole back to camp, with a lump in his throat, but a great resolution in his breast.

He gathered up his few personal possessions—some fishing tackle, an old steel trap, and an air rifle.

Then, after scrawling a note to his mother by the fitful flames of the expiring fire, and slipping it under the flap of the dog tent, where she slept alone, he crept down to the shore, untied a little punt, and paddled noiselessly away.

Half an hour later he bumped the side of Crazy Jake Patterson's house boat, the *Valley Belle*. The eccentric trader almost instantly appeared with a sawed-off shotgun in his hands. But recognizing the diminutive intruder, he lowered the deadly weapon, smiled, and complacently shifted his quid of tobacco.

After hearing the boy's story, he said, with that lack of responsibility which had earned him his title:

"Course you kin come with me. Fetch your baggage aboard, and consider yourself fust mate."



## CHAPTER III.

## A TRAIL OF BUBBLES.

The journey down the river in the shanty boat, with the rhythm of the pounding old engine and the splashing stern wheel in his ears, should have been tremendously interesting to Robin.

But something evil had befallen him. A wicked jinni seemed to have snatched his childhood from him in a night. He mostly watched the passing show with sober, unresponsive eyes.

He thought much of his mother, and at night, when the frogs croaked dolefully and the black-crowned night herons squawked overhead, he frequently cried himself to sleep in his rude little bunk.

Often he dreamed of his old home back in Ohio—the great elms which thrust their green canopies heavenward, the orioles' pendant, high-swung cradles, the grape arbor, and the orchard, and in a far corner of the grounds a tangled copse frequented by catbirds and brown thrashers.

He wooed these dreams, for they carried him back to a period when he did not hate his father—when, in fact, he loved him almost as much as he loved his mother. At that time his father wore fine clothes, brought home candy and toys, kissed Robin and his mother when he left in the morning and when he returned at night.

After what seemed an age to the homesick runaway, the *Valley Belle* reached Laredo, renewed her stock of goods, and turned her nose upstream.

Another age passed. Then, lo, late one afternoon, Jake carried the shore line to the selfsame stump to which it had been attached on the night when Robin first came aboard. He yearned to set off for home at once—for his heart had softened wonderfully toward his father throughout these weeks, and he had no doubt that his father's had likewise softened toward him. But Jake was not well, and Robin loyally pulled upstream a short distance to catch some fish for supper.

He anchored his punt behind a leafy screen of willows which fringed the

shore of a low, sandy island. Here twilight found him, hoping to add one more "cat" to the two already on his stringer.

Suddenly he was startled by the snapping of dry branches in the thicket on the main bank of the river, just opposite him, and he peeped out in time to see two men slide down the steep escarpment of clay, leap into a scow, and paddle hurriedly for the island.

They landed within three rods of him, hauled their boat out of the water, and hastily carried it into the rank growth beyond.

A moment later they reappeared. While the taller of the pair, who had but one eye, obliterated their footprints in the sand, his companion, who walked with a decided limp, drew something from his pocket, tied a flat stone to it, and flung it into the river. Then both quickly retired.

The object struck the center within ten feet of Robin's ambush, sank, and left behind it only a trail of bubbles. But a moment later, evidently having escaped from its weight, it slowly rose to the surface; and Robin, trembling with excitement, swung out his pole, worked his hook under the string which still encircled it, and finally landed the bit of dripping flotsam in his boat.

It proved to be a pocketbook, and it contained a number of papers, business cards, a blue silk badge, and a strip of penny pictures of a little girl. But the thing which really interested the boy was the name "John A. Foreman" stamped in gilt letters on one of the flaps.

Robin's mother had told him all about this same Mr. Foreman. He was the governor of this new State, a good and brave man, who was doing his best to subdue the vicious and criminal men and women who, like vultures attracted by carrion, flock to every new outpost of civilization.

Yet the boy had no suspicion of the momentous nature of his find until his arrival, the next day, in Prairie City, where Jake had dispatched him for medicine and food. He then learned, by eavesdropping about a knot of ex-

cited men, that Governor Foreman had been murdered the evening before, within half a mile of the city.

Overwhelmed by this news, in connection with his adventure of the evening before, the perspiration broke out on Robin's face. For a moment he was panic-stricken, imagining that the discovery of the book upon his person would convict him of the crime.

But he soon perceived that the thing for him to do was to surrender the book to the authorities and tell his story. As a preliminary to this, he approached a tall, thin, white-haired man who wore a black Prince Albert coat.

"Mister, do they—do they know who killed the gov'ner?" he asked in a voice which quavered slightly.

"Yes, my boy. They caught him inside of an hour after the commission of the crime."

"Was there—was there only one?"

"Only one. His name is Horace Sale."

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE KEY TO FREEDOM.

Robin did not move—scarcely blinked. Long after the man had walked away, he still stood rooted to the spot, his lips half parted, his eyes round and staring.

The heavens began to belly in and out, like a huge canvas in a storm; the clouds spun about like merry-go-rounds; the distant line of trees along the river undulated like a mighty serpent.

Then, bracing himself, he set out for the *Valley Belle*.

As he hurried along under the pitiless sun, the great thought in his mind was that he carried in his breast pocket that which would set his father, an innocent man, free. But he wanted first to make sure that no harm had come to his mother, left alone all night. He fairly flung down his packages on the house boat, called good-by to Jake, sprang ashore again, and set out at a mad pace for the spot he called home.

He stumbled over roots, pitched into gullies, and scratched his face and

hands in his blind dashes through the willow and cottonwood thickets. The trail seemed to lengthen, nightmare fashion, beneath his feet. But at last he glimpsed a landmark in the shape of a dead tree, and a minute later reached the open space about the camp.

There he stopped—as short as if against a stone wall. There was no camp. The horses were gone, the wagon, the iron tripod for the kettle, the clothesline, the trestles and board which had served as a table—everything but the dilapidated dog tent and his mother. And Robin, taking in a pile of empty bottles—tall round ones, short square ones, thin flat ones, half pints, pints, and quarts—knew for what everything had gone.

His mother sat on a soap box, her hands clasped about one knee, gazing into the rosy, sunset western sky. She was not weeping, as Robin had expected her to be; but a grayness about her face, like November dusk; a deadness, like ashes, in her eyes; and the thinness of her bare forearm brought a lump into the boy's throat.

Yet it was not these things that his eyes dwelt longest upon, but a bruised spot on the cheek nearest him.

He instinctively divined the source of that spot, and as he moved forward, with set, white lips, his resolution was made. He was no longer the bearer of a reprieve. He was an executioner, to whom all appeals for mercy would be in vain. He then and there solemnly swore that his father should die.

The law should hang him, but only he—Robin—would know that it was not for killing a fellow being, but for breaking a woman's heart.

His appearance did not startle his mother. She smiled, folded him to her breast, and kissed him. They were slow, lingering, abstracted kisses, not the sweet rain which she used to pour upon his face when he had been away—say over to his grandmother's—for only a few hours instead of weeks, as this time.

And when finally he spoke of his father, a tremor swept down her body, and she gazed long and thoughtfully

into his brown eyes, as she used to do when he was a babe, as if wondering what mysterious processes were going on in that closed chamber called the soul.

During the black days which followed—when the proceeds from his mother's wedding ring were gone and their diet was mainly the hateful catfish—Robin's heart only grew harder toward the author of their misery.

He supposed that his mother felt likewise. He remembered her having said to his father that it would be better for him to die than to live on, a slave of drink.

Moreover, she never mentioned his name any more, never asked Robin, after errands to Prairie City, if he had heard any news of his father. Hence he was convinced that she had abandoned the man to his fate. Yet with instinctive caution he kept from her the story of his adventure on the river and his knowledge of his father's innocence.

Women were tender creatures, so far as he had observed—quick to forgive—kissing where a man would strike—melting at the sight of suffering—stopping after only a spank or two if a boy but howled loud enough.

He therefore bravely assumed his great responsibility alone. He presently became possessed of a desire, however, to see his father's face once more. Its exact lineaments had escaped him curiously. Sometimes it was the kind face of the father back in Ohio, again it was the unshaven, inflamed face of the camp.

So, when in town one day, he visited the jail, boy fashion. That is to say, he approached it circuitously, creeping through tall weeds from one pile of building material to another, and finally flattening himself behind a pile of sand, some fifty feet from the squat structure which Prairie City had found it expedient to erect in advance of town hall, church, or schoolhouse.

Two grated windows pierced the wall. At one of these stood a rather pretty woman, with tousled hair, flushed face, and a number of gold

bracelets on her bare forearms. She was chaffing with a knot of men who stood beneath, occasionally bursting into a laugh and exposing a set of perfect teeth. Now and then she swore good-naturedly.

Abashed at this, Robin turned his eyes to the other window. It was empty at first, but presently a man—Horace Sale—appeared. His son did not recognize him until after an appreciable interval. He was coatless, his filthy shirt was torn to shreds, his hair and beard hung in greasy tangles. The hands which gripped the prison bars were as grimy as a stoker's.

## CHAPTER V.

### HIS LAST DRINK.

Pity smote the boy's heart for a moment. Young as he was, he sensed something of the tragedy which was playing before him.

Presently one of the men at the other window passed a flask up to the woman. After she had taken a draft and returned the flask, the man stepped over to Sale's window, and said: "Pardner, you and me has never met, but I reckon you're dry."

Then a most astonishing thing happened. Sale shook his head, and in a voice plainly audible to Robin's startled ears answered:

"Thank you, my friend, but I have taken my last drink." To the boy it was as if he had declined food or sleep.

That same afternoon—most unexpectedly to Robin—his Grandfather Graves arrived. He came in a carriage—the only carriage in Prairie City. He stopped the vehicle some rods from the camp, and approached on foot, with his precise, military step. At sight of the miserable place he suddenly paused, head erect and eyes flashing; and as his daughter rushed into his arms with a sob, he patted her head, and said sternly:

"The infamous wretch! The noose is too good for him. Yet he shall have a fair trial, my boy."

Robin thus learned, with some chagrin, that his grandfather had come not



to take him and his mother home, but to defend his father.

The fact puzzled him, and as they all rode back to town together—abandoning the camp forever—Robin framed some questions which he would have liked to ask his grandfather, who was a great lawyer and knew practically all there was to be known.

One was: If my father deserves the noose, why do you not let the noose have him? Another was: If my mother is suffering a living death through my father, as I have heard you say, why should you prolong her suffering by trying to set my father free?

He had no intention of putting these questions, but he had answered them satisfactorily to himself, and he intended to abide by those answers through thick and thin.

It was no easy matter, though. Conflicting emotions raged in his breast as the crucial hour drew nigh.

On the day of the trial, after his grandfather and mother had left for the courthouse, he stole away from his companions, and lay down in the shade of a secluded pile of lumber—a sad, forlorn little figure, into whose eyes a tear now and then stole, and whose chest occasionally shivered from a long-drawn sigh.

As never before, he felt the weight of the terrible responsibility which he had assumed. He had become as a god, an arbiter of a human being's destiny. In his hands he held the keys of Life and Death. As long as he suppressed his story, the judge, jurors, and attorneys up at the courthouse were as children chasing butterflies.

As he gazed across the hot, throbbing landscape to the distant horizon, one of the clouds in a mass of cumuli took on—so he fancied—the form of a tombstone, dazzling and massive. About it drifted white objects like angels. Was it a sign to him in his black abyss of indecision? If so, what was its portent?

He no longer hated his father, for his father was now a pitiful, impotent thing, unable to punish even the boys who threw stones at his cell window.

No, it was love for his mother, and this alone, which held the boy to his course. But he had discovered that she wanted his father to live, and, while he believed that this was mere weakness on her part, the fact had sadly complicated his duty.

Another thing bothered him—his father had refused a drink. He who had said that he would die with the fumes of whisky upon his breath had also said:

"I have taken my last drink."

And he had said it in prison, when abandoned, as he must have believed, by the only creature on earth who could help him. This now struck the boy as a fine, noble thing to do. Tears filled his eyes, and, pressing his face to the earth, he prayed aloud:

"O Heaven, tell me what to do! Tell me how to make mother happiest and yet be square with father!"

## CHAPTER VI.

### A LONGED-FOR CHANCE.

As Robin lay waiting for an answer, he heard voices, and two men passed by.

"The evidence was only circumstantial," said one of them. "It was his threat to kill the governor that decided the jury."

The swift frontier trial was over. It was too late now for him to act. He rose, and in a solemn, chastened mood started for home. At the next corner he paused, then turned and made his way toward the jail. Sheriff Baynes, who sat at a table, writing, in the front office, did not hear the muffled steps of the barefoot boy. Robin opened his mouth twice before any sound issued, and then he heard himself saying, in some other boy's voice:

"Please, sir, may I see my father, who is to be hung?"

The sheriff started, hesitated an instant, and then with a very kind "Why, yes, my boy," he led the lad down the corridor, admitted him to a cell, and hastily retired.

It was dusky in the cell, and for a moment the blinking boy saw nothing. Then he drew back as if at an apparition.

tion. Before him sat a man clad in black clothes and fresh linen, with smooth-shaven cheeks and neatly brushed hair—the father that Robin had known back in Ohio.

Sale, who sat with a book in his lap, did not look up at once. When he did, his eyes widened; but quickly he smiled, just as if nothing had happened that day over at the courthouse.

"You have come to see me, Robin?"

"Yes, sir," came the scarcely audible answer.

"You have forgiven me for all that I have done to you?"

"Yes, sir—father. I forgave you some time ago."

"God bless you for that." The man's lips quivered a moment. "I do not deserve your forgiveness, my son. I have not been a good father to you. You will go through life branded a murderer's son. But, my dear little man, remember this—you are not a murderer's son. The death of Governor Foreman rests upon some other soul than mine."

He drew the boy closer, and stroked his damp forehead for a little. Then he continued, softly and soothingly:

"My dying, though unjustly, makes little difference. My course was run even before these iron walls compassed me about. But you, Robin, when you are old enough, must take up my work where I dropped it.

"Gather up the broken threads. Carry on the honorable traditions of the two families from which you spring. But, above all, be good, oh, be very, very good to mother. She is an angel whom you and I have entertained unawares.

"Perhaps you can mend her broken heart. Perhaps—perhaps you can wipe out the memory of the blow I gave her

the other day with this hand—this same hand that I gave her at the altar. If you can do that, you may yet make her bless the day she married me. If I were sure you could do that, son, I should die without a pang."

His voice grew husky, and he buried his face in his hands.

"Oh, what price would I not pay to be given the chance to wipe out the memory of that blow myself!"

Robin stared at the grief-stricken figure for a moment. Then he shouted, almost fiercely:

"Father! Father! I'll give you the chance!"

He flew to the door, pounded upon it, and yelled for the sheriff. Released, he disappeared as if on wings. Five minutes later, with hot cheeks and throbbing temples, he was half shouting, half sobbing his story of the governor's pocketbook into his Grandfather Graves' astonished ears.

Then, stricken with a weariness such as he had never known before, he closed his eyes, and fell across the old gentleman's knees.

It was many days before he awoke, in any proper sense. He recognized his mother sitting at the foot of the bed. Then he quietly repeated, without just knowing why, the words which he had been babbling in his delirium for two weeks:

"The tall man has only one eye, and the short one limps!"

"Yes," said a voice in his ear. "They are both in jail now. They have confessed to killing the governor."

Robin raised his eyes, looked, and smiled. The voice and the face were his father's.

"Are we in Middletown?" he asked.

"No, but we shall be there soon," answered Horace Sale. "Just as soon as you are well enough to travel."

## An Eye-Opener

**T**OURIST at "first-class" hotel, awaking with a yawn—"I'm so sleepy I can hardly open my eyes."

Waiter, who has been told to call him in time for the omnibus—"Shall I bring you your bill, sir?"

# The Sunset Express

By Francis Marlowe

In this stirring story of the railroad, you are brought close to the lives of the real "men of the iron trail," the alert, keen-eyed, hard-handed men who do the actual work. It is a gripping tale, graphically told, and this, the concluding section, is the best part of the yarn.

## What happened in the preceding chapters.

Jim Harvey, a young chap from New York State, being left alone in the world, goes to Montreal with the intention of getting a job on the Sunset Railroad, the general manager of which, Mr. Fletcher, was an old friend of his father.

Mr. Fletcher, however, thinking the young man not strong enough to stand the hardships of railroad life, gets him a position in a store, but this does not suit Jim, and after a few weeks he succeeds in getting a job as a wiper at the roundhouse of the Sunset company.

He makes good, and is presently made fireman of a passenger train. While on this run he saves the express car from robbers, and his daring act leads to the capture of the thieves.

Partly as a reward for this act, and partly because there is a strike on the line and men are scarce, he is again promoted to fireman of the Sunset Express, the most important train on the road.

While on this job the engine is disabled by strikers, but Jim cleverly manages to get another locomotive, thus putting the express through almost on time, and thereby saving the company's mail and express contracts.

For this he is transferred to the shops, whence, after some years and a number of exciting adventures, he is finally promoted to the throttle of the Sunset Express, a full-fledged engineer.

During the winter, on one of his days off, a blizzard arises, and Harvey is asked to run the flanger of the snowplow, sent ahead of the express; it is a difficult and dangerous job, but Jim successfully carries it through until almost at the end of the run an old, forgotten switch derails the car, seriously injuring one of his men.

Running back to halt the express, Jim passes three men who fail to answer his hail; a moment later he comes to the express at a standstill, and learns that it has been held up by robbers, and the engineer seriously wounded.

Boarding the engine, he runs the train to the scene of the plow wreck, where he finds

the robbers have seized the plow locomotive and escaped.

In this crisis he conceives a scheme by which he hopes to capture the robbers, recover the loot, and possibly square himself for having wrecked the flanger.

To think is to act with Jim, and he immediately shuts off steam and, jumping from the engine, dashes back to the baggage car.

## CHAPTER XXI—(Continued).

TWO minutes later an ingenious contrivance for telegraphing from trains was in operation. A long pole, of the style used for overhead trolley trams, connected a transmitter inside the baggage car with the telegraph wire that ran beside the tracks, and a furious call for Oakshott was answered within a minute.

Jim dictated the message:

Express held up. Robbers escaped on snowplow engine. Switch engine on to siding this side of Oakshott, and capture them.

He waited till the pregnant words "All right!" came through, then he rushed back to the engine, and quickly got her under way again.

As the express rushed through the outskirts of Oakshott, little more than twenty minutes later, Jim saw a crowd of men on a siding, close to an overturned engine, from which steam was escaping in volumes.

"They've got them," he cried to Hobbs.

He was right; the train robbers were caught in the trap he had set for them. His share in the accident to the flanger car was overlooked, and he was retained to drive the Sunset Express until Sullivan had recovered from his wound.



## CHAPTER XXII.

## THE FREIGHT PATROL.

Sullivan returned to duty at last, and on the same morning that he did so Jim Harvey was notified by the roundhouse foreman that he was to report at once to the general manager's office.

"The G. M. himself wants to see you, Harvey," said the foreman. "I don't know what it's for, but if it's any trouble you can call on me to give you a good character."

Jim thanked him with a cheerful smile, and hurried off to headquarters. He found that Mr. Fletcher had given orders that he was to be admitted direct to his presence as soon as he arrived.

The general manager was very cordial in his greeting, and soon set the young engineer completely at his ease.

"You have proved that you've got the right sort of stuff in you, Jim," he began, "and, as I have made up my mind to drive the freight thieves out of the company's yards, I have sent for you to take the matter in hand. I want you to take hold of it with both hands and not let go till you have pulled it through or have to come to me and say you are beaten."

Jim's alert attention showed how intensely this preface interested him.

"I suppose," continued the general manager, "that you know we have been losing large sums of money every year through robberies from our freight cars. Our losses in this direction have been annually increasing, and last year they cost us over one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars. The line can't stand it, and it's got to stop. Your job is to stop it. Take a week to go into the matter and make your plans, and then come to me and tell me what you want in the way of men or money."

Jim Harvey drew a long breath.

"I'll be glad to take the job, sir," he said gravely, "and I'll do the best I can with it."

"You've got the spirit it needs," said Mr. Fletcher, "but I warn you, you'll need all your nerve and brain to tackle it. There are about three hundred thieves, men and boys, with about half

a dozen women, making a living by stealing our freight. They're clever and desperate, and will put up a stiff fight. They've made a kind of wholesale business of it now, and even work by daylight as well as at night. If one of our watchmen or the trainmen happens across a gang of them at work, it means little or nothing to the thieves—a blow on the head or a shove under a passing train prevents alarm and discovery."

"Your watchmen aren't much use, sir," Jim remarked.

"Absolutely useless, Jim," answered Mr. Fletcher. "We've had more cars looted since we put them on than ever before."

"Will you allow me to take any one I need to help me in this matter?" asked Jim.

"Just say whom you want, and you can have him," was the brisk reply.

Jim Harvey rose to his feet.

"I'm ready," he said; "but I want you to let me have Sullivan, the driver of the Sunset Express."

The G. M. lifted his eyebrows as though the request surprised him a little; then he took a slip of paper, and rapidly wrote a few words.

"Give this to Sullivan," he said, handing Jim the slip of paper. "He's a good man, and I can't easily spare him, but if you want him you must have him."

On the fifth morning after the G. M. had declared war on the freight thieves, Jim Harvey walked into headquarters with all his plans ready.

"I want quarters for twenty men and a guarantee of twenty thousand dollars to pay them for a year."

With this blunt announcement Jim almost succeeded in startling the general manager.

"Say that again," said the G. M. "I suppose it means something."

Jim smiled, and repeated his words.

"You see," he continued, "I can't think of any other way to deal with the business. Our present watchmen are too old to be any use, and we can't rely on the police, so I intend to raise a freight patrol. If you'll sanction it,

we'll have a 'force' of our own that will cut down your losses in short order."

The G. M. considered the proposition silently for a few moments. Suddenly he looked up at Jim, and said briefly, but decisively: "You can have ten thousand dollars, and try your patrol for six months."

"About their quarters?" said Jim.

"You have the men ready?"

Jim nodded.

"Board them somewhere in town for a day or two, and I'll have quarters fixed up for them by the beginning of the week."

Jim Harvey had picked out his twenty men within a week. Eight of them were young college athletes, who had proved their mettle on the football field, and who were attracted to the employment he offered them by its adventurous possibilities.

Of the rest, Sullivan had introduced three whom he vouched for; three others had been cowboys, four were once soldiers, and the remaining two were recruited from the police force. All of them were young and lusty, and had proved their courage.

The general manager duly provided quarters for the patrol, and at the end of their first week of duty the men found themselves comfortably housed close to the railway headquarters.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE TRAP.

Sullivan was like a smoldering torch. A breath was sufficient to fan his martial spirit into a flame, and the preparations for waging war against the train thieves had roused him to fighting pitch.

"Let's give the dirty thieves a touch of our quality," he exclaimed one night as Jim was on the point of starting the ten night men for their duty and dismissing the others. "I hear there's some valuable freight in the South Side yards, and, as the robbers are always busy there, it'll be a fine bait for them. We can turn up in full force, and give them a lesson they'll not forget in a hurry."

Jim thought the plan a good one, but

thought it as well to sound his men before agreeing to it. Sullivan's eyes lighted up with pleasure as he heard their hearty agreement to the suggestion.

"Good boys!" he cried, "you're the stuff for this business. By the piper, I'm proud of ye!"

Looking over his recruits and noting the keen, adventurous spirit that shone in their faces, Jim Harvey felt that he could not have selected men better suited for his purpose.

Their skill as marksmen was one of the chief reasons why they had been picked for the patrol. Jim referred to this now in his final instructions to them.

"Remember," he insisted, "that you do not shoot to kill. Hit the legs when you can, but never a vital part; I don't want any of you held for manslaughter or murder."

After a short consultation with Sullivan, Jim decided to avail himself of a stratagem, and within an hour the patrol was ambushed in two box cars that, in company with three cars of inanimate freight, were being leisurely hauled toward the South Side yards.

The South Side freight yards of the Sunset Line were in the most desolate part of Montreal. About a hundred yards from their eastern boundary, which was a ten-foot wall, there were about forty low-class tenement houses that had a male criminal population of close on fifty.

These men formed the nucleus of the most determined gang of the train-robbing fraternity. Their chief was a clever thief known as "Black" Michaels, who found an able lieutenant in his son, "Spike" Michaels.

Black Michaels had been three times charged with freight robberies; but, curiously, on each occasion the charge had broken down through the failure of a policeman to identify him as a thief who had been seen to steal freight.

Black Michaels had been since heard openly to boast that he could always buy enough influence to keep him out of prison. It was Jim Harvey's pet hope that he would succeed in catching Black

Michaels red-handed, and testing the worth of this boast.

To the west of the freight tracks no houses were in view. Waste land, dotted here and there with rubbish heaps and brick piles, stretched as far as the eye could see.

At all seasons of the year this was a locality to be avoided by the lonely wayfarer who had anything to lose, but in winter it was especially dangerous, for through it passed all the criminal tramps who were beating their way to Montreal in search of winter quarters.

The freight losses here were greater than on any other part of the Sunset system; for, in addition to regular gangs of thieves, there were hundreds of independent operators who, on their way to the city, levied tribute on the cars.

When the freight cars bearing the ambushed patrol had been switched on to a siding, and the engine uncoupled, two watchmen, who had been sitting half asleep over a coke fire, rose lazily to their feet, and strolled toward the newly arrived freight to make a casual inspection of it.

"Nothing special there," said one of the men, turning to get back to the fire.

His companion muttered a reply, and lumbered along beside him.

Jim Harvey had taken the precaution to have the cars that bore human freight left with their doors partly opened, so that there would be no betraying rattle when he and his men wished to get out. He had heard the watchmen approach, and was now listening to their receding footsteps.

All was quiet in the siding at last, and Jim, thinking it safe to reconnoiter, swung himself cautiously and silently from the car. He made sure that his movements could not be seen by the watchmen, and then he stepped along to the next car, and found Sullivan peering through the doorway, and anxiously awaiting permission to join them.

Sullivan answered his beckoning hand by springing lightly down beside him.

Together they surveyed the situation, moving stealthily in the shadow of the cars. Taking advantage of the gloomy

patches, Jim and Sullivan at last made a complete inspection of the siding.

They found that there were already half a dozen fully loaded cars on the line ahead of the cars that had conveyed them there. In addition to these, there were five cars on another switch between them and the ten-foot wall.

On one of the flat cars, carefully packed and covered to shelter it from the weather, was a very valuable motor car.

"There's a carload of sewing machines somewhere here," whispered Sullivan, "and another car full of electric fittings. I've been making a few inquiries to-day."

Jim nodded thoughtfully. There was clearly sufficient valuable booty to lure the thieves abroad that night, and he had no doubt that they would make a raid on the siding before the night was over.

"We must get our men hidden by the other line of cars, Sullivan," he said quietly.

With this in view the two leaders returned to their starting point, and by the favor of an obliging cloud bank that kept the moon hidden for five minutes, Jim very shortly had the patrol disposed on either side of the cars nearest to the ten-foot wall.

Every man's hand was on his revolver, but there was not a sign nor a sound that would have led a casual observer to suppose that there was a soul in the siding beyond the two sleepy watchmen.

Perhaps three minutes had passed since these preparations were completed when the ears of the silent watchers caught the sound of hurrying footsteps. A shout from one of the watchmen by the fire followed.

There was a confused murmur of voices, a sudden cry from the protesting watchman, a shrill whistle, and then a jeering laugh.

Jim Harvey and Sullivan, who were lying side by side between two cars, had watched the whole business. Four men, one a powerful-looking, swarthy ruffian with a fierce black mustache, had started



to make their way toward the freight cars.

One of the watchmen had lurched to his feet, and interposed. The men moved ahead without heeding his protest; he had laid his hand on one of them, and the next moment was brutally struck down.

"That's Spike Michaels that struck him," interjected Sullivan, who was only kept where he was by Jim's restraining hand. "Black Michaels is the big chap."

As the watchman fell, his companion blew a shrill alarm on his whistle. The jeering laugh that followed showed how little the wanderers feared interference from the police.

Without troubling to prevent him from whistling again, they passed the watchman, and continued their progress toward the cars.

"I've got him covered," muttered Sullivan. "Will I shoot?" His revolver was pointing straight at Black Michaels.

"Not a shot till I give the word," answered Jim; "they haven't touched the cars yet. Wait for me here." And he slipped away from Sullivan's side.

As Black Michaels got abreast of the first truck, he put his fingers to his lips, and blew a peculiar mellow whistle. Instantly, and plainly in answer to his signal, a swarm of men and boys appeared on the top of the ten-foot wall.

Several rope ladders were flung over, and by the help of these many of the older men reached the siding. The others, to the number of about twenty-five, swung by their hands and dropped.

Meanwhile there was a rumble of wheels by the side of the tracks, and before the last of the gang of thieves had dropped from the wall two heavy carts, each pulled by a pair of horses, drew up on the waste land beside the tracks.

A succession of blows and the rattling of bars a moment later told that the doors of many freight cars had been attacked. The moon, that for a full minute had been hidden, shone out again in all her power, and, as though this were a signal waited for, the rolling fire of a score of revolvers spat out.

The freight patrol had fired its first volley. Of the horde of thieves about a dozen fell howling dismally, while the others, though unwounded, yelled with sudden terror.

A mad rush—a retreat in horrible disorder—was stopped by the voice of Black Michaels, ringing out like a rifle shot.

Every sound man of the thieves stopped and stooped. When they rose, each of them had a handful of sharp flints from the roadbed of the siding.

Jim Harvey, who had again reached Sullivan's side, jumped from the shadow of the cars, followed by the Irishman and every man of the patrol. A volley of flint stones answered the second spitting fire of bullets.

A heavy stone hit Jim on the head; his thick cap saved his life, but the blow felled him. Sullivan from the tail of his eye saw who threw the stone. It was Spike Michaels. With a howl of rage, the Irishman fired his third shot.

He aimed at Spike's legs, but the little thief saw the gun pointed at him, and dived for the shelter of a truck; the bullet hit him in the chest, and he crawled under the truck, and died.

Besides Jim Harvey, two men of the patrol had dropped before the stones. Fifteen of the train pirates were accounted for by the bullets, but none killed except Spike Michaels.

"Capture Black Michaels!" gasped Jim Harvey, as Sullivan knelt beside him.

Happy to find that Jim was better than he had dared to hope, Sullivan, in a cross fire of bullets and stones, sprang forward. Black Michaels had found his son, and was lifting him in his arms when Sullivan reached him.

He pressed the body to him with his left arm, and his right fist met Sullivan's chin with such a crash that the driver went down like a felled ox.

He rose to his feet with a furious grunt two second later, but Black Michaels and his burden were in one of the two heavy carts, and the horses racing at full speed across the waste land.

The patrol had drawn first blood in the war with the thieves, but the death

of Spike Michaels had made Black Michaels a fierce and desperate enemy.

To his natural lawlessness was now added a vindictive and hate-inspired desire for revenge.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE BULLION MYSTERY.

The young chief of the Sunset Freight Patrol felt the responsibilities of his post grow heavy on his shoulders.

A very brief experience of the work of the Freight Patrol convinced Jim that it would be foolish to consider that the patrol had achieved any satisfactory measure of success so long as Black Michaels remained outside prison bars. The patrol had curbed the lawlessness of other gangs of thieves; it had arrested their leaders and broken their ranks so that they no longer dared to make organized raids on the freight yards.

Thefts had by no means ceased, but they had become less frequent, and it was seldom indeed that closed cars were "ripped" and looted except by Black Michaels' gang.

To arrest Black Michaels and break up his gang was now the absorbing aim of Jim Harvey's existence, but the crafty leader of the freight thieves seemed to anticipate all traps and ambushes. After his son had been killed, Black Michaels had disappeared for a time, and for many nights there was no trace of his hand in the raids on the freight tracks. At last, however, he returned to the scene of his former exploits, the South Side yards, and celebrated his reappearance by leading a horde of desperate ruffians who, though they left many wounded prisoners behind them, carried off a quantity of valuable goods from the cars, and damaged much that they could not take away.

Jim Harvey was tireless in planning schemes for Michaels' capture, but the man was still at large; he harassed the patrol men almost nightly, and day by day Jim Harvey's face grew more gloomy as he received reports of goods damaged or stolen from the freight cars.

At the end of a busy week Harvey

was in his office at headquarters reading reports from the patrol posts.

One letter referred to a matter of urgent importance, for it told Jim that a consignment of bullion, value twenty thousand dollars, was being dispatched that night from Montreal to Toronto, and asked him to see that one of the patrolmen traveled with the treasure to guard it.

Jim made a mental note of this as a matter demanding instant attention, though he was rather puzzled as to how he was going to spare a man from patrol duty.

The next instant he had almost forgotten it in the absorbing interest of the concluding paragraph of the letter:

*"I have just heard from the police that they have discovered where Black Michaels is living now. They have traced him to a tenement house near the South Side yards, and hope to arrest him to-night."*

This was cheering news for Jim Harvey, and quickly put him on good terms with himself again.

He was still in the first flush of elation at the very comforting news when the door of his office opened, and Sullivan, his lieutenant, entered the room.

"Oh, hello, Sullivan," said Jim hastily, "there's a matter here that needs immediate attention. There's twenty thousand dollars in gold going to Toronto to-night, and the general manager wants a man from the patrol to guard it. Whom shall we send?"

"By the piper, that's a question!" remarked Sullivan, fingering his beard thoughtfully. "We've two men in hospital, and that makes us mighty short-handed. Of course, if the general manager wants a man, he must have one, but how we're to spare him is more than I know, with Black Michaels liable to spring a surprise on us at any one of the patrol posts."

"The police will have Black Michaels to-night."

"I wouldn't reckon on that."

"I'll go to Toronto myself, then," said Jim. "The train starts in an hour, so I'll have to look sharp. Telegraph me if the police get Michaels."

"You'd better let me telegraph you if they *don't* catch him," said Sullivan, with a twinkle in his eye. "I'd like to have some message to send you."

"Oh, get out, you croaker!" cried Jim.

When Sullivan left him, Jim Harvey made hasty preparations for his journey to Toronto. He had very little time to spare, for the bullion was to be dispatched by the Sunset night express, a train that left Montreal every night at half-past seven.

He found that the gold was in the station agent's office, where a bank clerk and a porter were waiting to hand it over to his charge.

It was packed in two stout, wooden boxes, each of which weighed about half a hundredweight, the whole making a load that none but a very strong man could carry more than a short distance. Each of the boxes was securely corded and sealed.

When he had made sure that the bank's seals were intact, Jim Harvey signed the receipt that was presented to him, and had the boxes loaded on a truck, and conveyed to the baggage car of the express.

He found the baggage-master anxiously awaiting the arrival of the bullion, and pleased that the responsibility of safeguarding it had been taken off his shoulders.

Owing to the late arrival of some goods that were consigned to Toronto by the express, a slight delay was now necessary before the gold could be put aboard the train.

While the goods were being packed away, Jim Harvey sat on the truck that bore the gold, and watched operations. One article attracted his particular attention, and set him wondering how it happened that it was being dispatched by an express baggage car instead of by an ordinary freight train.

Both in bulk and weight it differed materially from the style of articles usually sent by express.

It interested him sufficiently to cause him to comment on it to the baggage-master.

"That's a curious-looking bit of goods," he said.

"Yes," was the reply. "It's a bit out of our line, too."

"What do you make of it?" asked Jim.

The article they were discussing was just then taxing the strength of three men to get it into the baggage car.

The baggage-master glanced casually at its curious shape while he answered Jim's question.

"It's consigned to a party in Toronto," he remarked. "Some crank, I'll bet. It's supposed to be a part of an airship—one of the *aéroplanes* they talk about; I expect that's the motor in that box in the middle of it."

It was satisfactorily disposed of at last, and then Jim's two boxes of treasure were lifted from the truck, and carried into the baggage car.

It was almost two hours after the train left Montreal when Jim was reminded, by an uncomfortable feeling in the pit of his stomach, that in hurrying to catch the express he had forgotten to take his usual evening meal.

He referred regretfully to this while he was talking to his companion, who quickly put him in the way of satisfying his appetite by reminding him that there was a supper car on the express.

Jim hesitated a moment as he thought of the gold that had been put in his charge; then, catching the baggage-master's eye, he laughed lightly. "There's no fear of any one breaking in on you while I'm away?" he asked.

The man pointed significantly to a Winchester rifle that lay in a rack above his head, and then unlocked the end door of the car. Jim quickly passed from the baggage car to the smoker, and thence on to the supper car, where he was soon busy ministering to a remarkably fine appetite.

He wound up his meal with a cup of coffee, and was sipping this with great enjoyment when he was startled by the grinding sound of hurriedly applied brakes, and almost flung from his seat by the sudden stoppage of the train.

He sprang to his feet, and listened tensely for some sound that might explain why the train had stopped. A sudden thought of the gold in the bag-



gage car flashed across his brain, and he felt instinctively that it was in some way connected with the startling stoppage of the express. The next instant he was running swiftly to the head of the train.

When he emerged from the end of the smoking car, he was quickly convinced that his apprehension that the bullion was in danger was only too well founded. The door of the baggage car would not yield to the pressure he applied.

He hammered at it frantically with the butt of his revolver, but there was no reply from the other side. He shouted to the baggage-master, and was conscious that beyond the door there was neither voice nor movement, only a grim, foreboding silence.

Unshaped thoughts of disaster were whirling through his head as he hurriedly jumped from the train. As he ran he overtook two men; these proved to be the conductor and a black porter.

The three men arrived together in front of the baggage car, and found the engineer staring in amazement at its wide-open door. Frantically anxious about the gold that had been intrusted to his care, Jim Harvey sprang into the car.

He found it deserted; the baggage-master had disappeared. He looked toward the corner where the gold had been placed; the two boxes of bullion were no longer there!

## CHAPTER XXV.

### AN AMAZING DISCOVERY.

They found the baggage-master lying in a huddled heap in a dark corner of the car, but this served to increase rather than explain the mystery of the vanished bullion, for he was unconscious, and, therefore, unable to give any account of what had happened. By the light of a lantern Jim Harvey discovered that the unfortunate man was terribly wounded on the head.

"See if there is a doctor among the passengers," he exclaimed hurriedly.

The conductor departed on this errand, and presently returned with a

young surgeon whom he had the luck to find in the smoking car.

After a brief examination, the doctor informed Jim that the injuries to the baggage-master's head were so severe that it was doubtful if the man would live until the train reached Toronto.

"Does any one know how this happened?" he added, looking curiously at the little group of anxious trainmen.

"It is impossible to say just yet," said Jim. "All we know is that a signal to stop the train was sent from the baggage car, and that when we investigated we found the door of the car open and the baggage-master lying here as you see him. It looks as if he fell heavily against something after he had given the signal for brakes."

"There's something more than that behind it," replied the doctor briskly. "My belief is that the man was struck on the head before he fell. There's a pretty bad wound here that wasn't caused by a fall."

The inexplicable disappearance of the bullion recurred to Jim, and he stepped swiftly toward the young doctor, and drew him aside.

"Are you sure of what you say?" he asked. "At first I thought something of the kind had happened, but how could it have been possible? The man was alone in the baggage car; I was out of the train almost before it stopped, and have had a search made in every direction without finding a sign of any one who might have attacked him."

In spite of Jim's earnest words the doctor adhered firmly to his opinion that the baggage-master had been struck down. The mystery grew very black.

Toronto was reached at last. The still unconscious baggage-master, accompanied by the doctor, was removed in an ambulance to the nearest hospital.

Jim Harvey, stepping from the baggage car, found a bank clerk waiting to relieve him of the twenty thousand dollars that had been intrusted to his charge.

As a last, forlorn hope, before explaining the situation to the bank's representative, he stood grimly by the car until everything it contained had been

removed from it. Then he turned to the bank clerk.

At that moment the conductor of the express handed a telegram to Jim, and he turned from the clerk to read it.

It was from Sullivan, and ran:

Black Michaels not arrested. Police say he has cleared out of town. SULLIVAN.

Jim crumpled the telegram impatiently in his hand, and moved toward the station agent's office to send a message to the general manager announcing the loss of the gold. He was busy writing a telegram when the office telephone tinkled.

"Here's a telephone call for you, Mr. Harvey," called out the station agent from his desk.

Jim stepped quickly to the instrument, and found that the young doctor who had attended to the injured man was waiting to speak to him.

"The man has recovered consciousness and may pull through now," were the doctor's first words. They thrilled Jim with the hope that now he could obtain a clew to the missing gold.

"Can he speak? Has he said anything?" he asked hurriedly.

"He can scarcely speak," replied the doctor. "I've made out that he suddenly found a man in the baggage car, and was struck on the head as he was signaling for the brakes. That's all I've been able to get from him, and it would be dangerous to question him further now."

Jim dropped the telephone receiver almost before the doctor had concluded. A possible solution of the mystery had suddenly flashed across his mind, and he was anxious to put it to the test while there was yet time.

He astonished the station agent by turning sharply, with the request:

"Come quickly with me and pick up some good men as we go along. I want them to tackle a dangerous business."

Luckily for Jim's purpose, the station agent, a keen, alert official, did his bidding without question, and a minute later when Jim got to the station yard there were four sturdy men behind him

watching his movements with obvious wonder.

A quick glance round the yard showed Jim what he was in search of. On a truck that was leaving the yard just at that moment was the supposed section of the aeroplane that he had seen put aboard the express at Montreal.

Somewhat resembling a skeleton bow of a boat in outline, it was made of plain iron and was inclosed in an oblong framework of wood about seven feet in length.

Inside the metal frame, secured to it firmly at the base and fastened to its bow-shaped apex by a short chain, was a wooden box standing almost as high as the outside wooden frame and about three feet wide by two feet deep.

Jim Harvey had seen two men take charge of this strange-looking affair when it was removed from the baggage car, and now he saw these same two men sitting on the driving seat of the truck.

He turned to the men behind him, and pointed to those on the truck.

"I want you to look after those men when I call on them to stop," he said quietly.

An instant afterward he darted ahead of the truck, and confronted the driver with a threatening revolver.

"Get down!" he cried sharply. "I want to have a look at that funny business you have there."

The man uttered a shout of alarm, and jumped from the truck like a flash, but was immediately seized and held by two of Jim's men. The second man on the truck sat staring at Jim in amazement, and made no attempt to move.

"I want you to open that thing," said Jim to him, pointing with his revolver at the wooden box in the metal framework.

The man turned his head, and looked at the long box in a puzzled fashion. He had opened his mouth to speak, when suddenly the front panel of the box swung out toward him, and a black figure flashed past him, and sprang wildly from the truck into the midst of the amazed railway men.

Taken by surprise as he was by the

suddenness of the thing, yet Jim Harvey had recognized the swarthy, powerful figure that had emerged from the box. His voice rang out in a sharp command to the railway men:

"Hold that man!"

With his revolver ready for use, he stepped forward as he spoke, but the man had fallen as he reached the ground, and he now lay pinned under three of the sturdy station hands.

Jim looked at the swarthy face as it stared viciously up at him, and he saw that he had made no mistake. It was Black Michaels.

At the bottom of the box that Black Michaels had made such a desperate effort to escape from, Jim Harvey found the two missing boxes of bullion.

Within an hour they were safe in the vaults of the bank they had been consigned to, and in far less time than that Black Michaels was behind stout prison bars.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### AT HARRISVILLE.

Jim Harvey found it difficult to conceal his discontent at a message he had just received from headquarters. It told him that the general manager had placed his private car at his disposal, and wished him to proceed at once to Harrisville, a small station about two hundred miles from headquarters, to inquire into some breach of the regulations that had been reported by the chief train dispatcher.

In three days Black Michaels was to be tried for his desperate attempt to steal the bullion from the night express to Toronto, and it was of paramount importance that he should be at the trial to give evidence against the lawless train pirate.

If he failed to appear as a witness, it was almost inevitable that Black Michaels would go free, for the baggage-master whom he had attacked was in no condition to attend the court, and it was certain that if he did he could not identify his assailant.

Then, too, Jim Harvey had found that the train hands who had helped him

to capture the freight thief were strangely unwilling to be dragged into the trial.

He traced this reluctance to their fear of the vengeance of Black Michaels' gang, and knew that, though he should get them into the witness box, they would prove unreliable witnesses.

Under these circumstances Jim Harvey was naturally ill at ease and fearful lest any chance should make it impossible for him to attend the trial.

Now, although Mr. Fletcher gave no hint of this to Jim, the journey to Harrisville was of no urgent importance, and might easily have been delayed or delegated to some minor official of the company.

The truth of the matter was that the general manager had received reliable information that an attempt was to be made to prevent Jim Harvey from appearing against Black Michaels, and had decided that the best means of check-mating any plot that might be brewing was to get Jim out of Montreal, and thus put him beyond the reach of the conspirators.

The journey to Harrisville was uneventful, and, while the private car was being switched on to a siding, Jim Harvey chatted with the station agent, Wilkins.

"We'll postpone our business talk until the morning," he said presently. "I don't want to break into your rest hours, and if we get to work after breakfast to-morrow, we'll finish up in time for you to flag the noon train, so that I can get back to Montreal in the evening. Just now, if you've no objection, I'll take a walk with you, and see what kind of a little village you are living in."

Wilkins welcomed this proposition heartily, and cordially suggested that when they reached Harrisville, which lay about a mile and a half from the station, Jim should stay an hour or so with him and share his supper.

"There's nothing in the way of sights to show you," he remarked. "The village has grown up round a couple of paper mills, and the residents don't amount to more than three hundred people, most of whom are employed at



the mills. You'll understand now why passenger trains seldom stop here; the station is mostly used for the transport of freight."

"You had two passengers this evening," said Jim, casually remembering two men he had seen leave the train.

"Yes," replied Wilkins; "I did not notice them particularly, although they were strangers. They are probably new hands for one of the mills."

Just then the night telegraph operator arrived, and while Wilkins closed up his office, and left this official in charge of the station, Jim Harvey walked to the private car, and asked the black porter who looked after it to tell the cook not to expect him to supper.

This done, he rejoined Wilkins, and together they stepped from the platform into the narrow, white ribbon of road that ran vagrantly through the wooded countryside to Harrisville.

Jim Harvey supped frugally with the station agent, and chatted with him for about an hour afterward. Then he set out to walk to the private car, where his bed awaited him; but, though the black porter sat watching for him till long after midnight, he did not arrive there, and in the morning, when Wilkins looked for him to keep the appointment he had made on the previous night, he was missing.

In the train dispatcher's office, at the headquarters of the Sunset Line in Montreal, the news of Jim Harvey's strange disappearance caused a very considerable sensation.

Something of the real reason of Jim's mission to Harrisville had leaked out, and Coleman, chief train dispatcher, who knew the actual facts from the general manager, quickly concluded that, even if worse had not befallen him, Jim Harvey had been kidnaped to prevent him from giving evidence against Black Michaels.

In short, pithy sentences he explained the situation to Mr. Fletcher, and concluded a hurried conference by suggesting that a couple of men should at once be sent to Harrisville to help in the search for Jim Harvey.

Mr. Fletcher, who was troubled with

the most alarming fears and pictured Jim as badly injured, if not already dead, welcomed this forlorn hope of saving him from Black Michaels' vengeance.

He sent an urgent message to Sullivan, Jim Harvey's lieutenant on the Freight Patrol, telling him the news and bidding him report at the roundhouse at once for a journey to Harrisville, while he himself made immediate preparation to accompany him.

An hour later, Sullivan, an engineer again for that trip, took out the best locomotive then in the roundhouse, and with one car attached, in which the general manager and Payne, of the Freight Patrol, sat as passengers, made a record run to Harrisville.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### IMPRISONED.

At about the same time that Wilkins of Harrisville was relating the details of Jim Harvey's disappearance to the chief train dispatcher, the missing chief of the Freight Patrol was painfully trying to open his eyes and wondering vaguely why he had such a fierce, throbbing ache in his head.

He was lying flat on his back, but presently, when he managed to lift his eyelids, he rose to a sitting position, and looked around him.

He saw that he was in a dirty, dimly lighted room that was perfectly bare except for a bundle of foul-looking straw in one corner.

From the walls and ceiling great patches of plaster had fallen, revealing bare laths and grimy brickwork.

The murkiness of the room was explained when he found that it had no other window than a narrow slit in the wall that was overhung by cobwebs.

The door was facing him, but he had not the strength yet to find out whether it was locked and held him prisoner or merely shut.

He felt very weak and dazed, and leaned against the wall to support himself. Then he tried to reconstruct the events that had occurred since his arrival in Harrisville. He remembered

that he had eaten supper with the station agent, and then started to walk back to the railway station.

The idea presented itself that Wilkins had followed him stealthily and assaulted him, but he instantly dismissed this as absurd. But something must have happened to him, and whatever it was could scarcely have been an accident, or else he would not have awakened to find himself in such a villainous-looking room.

His head ached terribly when he tried to think, but at last in a hazy way he recalled that when he had left Harrisville about half a mile in his rear, he had heard the soft patter of footsteps close behind him, and had turned to discover the reason.

His memory would serve him no further than this, and it was plain to him now that he had been struck down when he turned.

When at last he staggered to his feet and reached the door to find it securely fastened, he knew that he had hit on the truth, that he had been trapped, and that Black Michaels was at the bottom of the treacherous business.

The impulse to escape without delay seized him strongly at this thought, and he flung himself furiously at the door.

There was a swift and startling answer to the crash of the impact of his body against the panels.

"Drop that!" came a curt command, in a rough, brutal voice, from the other side of the door.

"Let me out of here!" shouted Jim.

The only reply was a mocking chuckle.

"Open the door or I'll smash it down!" cried Jim wildly.

"If you have an ounce of sense in your head, you'll stay where you are and keep quiet," was the grim, threatening answer. "We're going to keep you here for a little holiday, but it'll be bad for your health if you make a noise."

Jim's answer to this was to hurl himself against the door with such violence that a panel split. He stepped back to prepare for another assault on it, but the man without checkmated this move

by suddenly opening the door, and entering the room. Jim found himself staring at a revolver.

"Maybe this will persuade you to stay quiet," growled the man, shaking the shining weapon threateningly. "Go over there and lie down."

He pointed to the heap of dirty straw as he spoke, and in that instant Jim jumped for him, and struck with all his strength at the point of the ugly jaw. The blow landed as he had hoped it would, the man fell to the boards with a crash, and the revolver exploded harmlessly.

Exultant at his success, Jim waited not an instant to see if the man could rise. He sprang to the door, passed through it, slammed it behind him, and locked it. Then, with his hand still on the key, he paused, breathless, to pull himself together before making his final dash for liberty.

While he stood thus he saw that he was at the head of a stairway. He felt a draft of air blow refreshingly on his face, and knew that he was but a step or two from the outer world. A moment only he lingered, and then he moved swiftly to the stairs.

As he turned the stairhead, the bulky body of a man who was stealthily ascending the stairs crashed into him.

He staggered back; but, before he could escape out of reach, a heavy fist swung toward his head, and sent him staggering against the door he had just locked. A second blow laid him unconscious on the floor.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### FOUND.

"By the Holy St. Patrick! but what's that?" exclaimed Sullivan.

The ex-engineer of the Sunset Express stood on the step of the general manager's Pullman, which still waited on the siding at Harrisville. For two days he had searched tirelessly for Jim Harvey, and now, after a restless night, he had given up all hope of sleep.

It was only because of his persistent belief that Jim Harvey was kept prisoner somewhere close at hand that he

still remained at Harrisville. Mr. Fletcher had given up the search in despair on the previous evening, and gone back to Montreal confident that Harvey had been secretly taken there, and, clinging to the hope that he might find some trace of him before Black Michaels' trial.

Payne had gone with him to return to his patrol duties, but Sullivan had begged for another day at Harrisville.

He had been staring for some time through the hazy dawn in the direction of the village when his exclamation of astonishment burst suddenly from his lips.

The next moment he rushed madly across the line and seized hold of a wild-looking figure that had just staggered from the road on to the station platform.

"It is Jim. By the piper, it is!" he shouted exultantly. Then he noticed that the arm he had gripped, and was working like a pump handle in his elation, hung limp in his grasp, and at the same moment Jim Harvey, for it was certainly his young chief, swayed toward him, and collapsed in his arms.

"Am I in time?" asked Jim weakly, as Sullivan picked him up as though he were a baby and carried him to the Pullman.

Sullivan's face was troubled. He knew that Jim referred to Black Michaels' trial, and he knew also that there was now no train on the schedule that could get them to Montreal in time. But he made up his mind to break this bad news to Jim as gently as possible.

"That's more than I can say right off," he replied. "We've not much time to spare, anyhow, but you can take it from me that we'll get to Montreal in time if mortal man can do it."

When he reached the Pullman, he laid Jim gently on the bed, set the black porter to work preparing bandages for his bruised head, and directed the cook to serve food and drink at once.

Meanwhile, he gathered Jim's story from him, and learned that his captors had stolen away less than four hours before, leaving him free to do as he willed.

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He judged from this that the kidnapers knew that there was no train running through Harrisville to Montreal until morning, and that there was, therefore, no longer need for them to act as jailers.

When Jim Harvey at last regained his liberty, he found that he had been imprisoned in a little shack in the woods less than two miles from the station.

"I'll be seeing about our train now," said Sullivan, in a confident tone, when he had assured himself that he could do no more for Jim's comfort and well-being.

He looked at his watch as he left the car and found that it was already a few minutes past six. If he could not get Jim Harvey to Montreal by eleven o'clock, Black Michaels would be set at liberty, for he had learned from Mr. Fletcher that there was no hope that the injured baggage-master would be able to give evidence against the train pirate.

"There's not a passenger train goes through here till close on nine o'clock," was the night operator's reply to his anxious inquiries.

"Isn't there any sort of an ould engine about at all?" cried Sullivan desperately.

The operator shook his head, and turned to attend to a message that was clicking from his sounder.

"And there's no time to get an engine from Montreal," muttered Sullivan. "What's the message?" he added idly, as the operator made a note on a pad, and turned toward him again.

"Oh, just to warn me of a freight coming from Bassett's Crossing."

"What!" yelled Sullivan, so fiercely that the operator fell back from him in alarm. "And ye wouldn't have told me of it if I hadn't chanced to ask ye?"

"But it's coming away from Montreal," remonstrated the operator feebly, "and, anyhow, it couldn't get you to Montreal by the time you want to be there."

"Man, man," exclaimed Sullivan, with angry disgust, "ye're enough to make a saint cuss! Has that freight left Bassett's Crossing yet?"



"It's just about pulling out, I should say."

"Well, then, get through a hurry call, and tell them to rush her along here like a streak of lightning. I'm going to have the engine off her, switch it on the turntable, and run it clean through to Montreal. Get a message through as quick as you can to headquarters; tell them what I want to do, and get authority to do it. Tell them Mr. Jim Harvey's found, and they'll give a clear line for that freight engine if it's the worst traveling scrap heap on the road."

A little later, swaying, plunging, shrieking furious notes of warning, the freight engine that Sullivan had commandeered rushed cometlike through the sleepy countryside. In the cab of the engine Sullivan, a demoniac figure, with inflamed, smoke-begrimed face and blazing eyes, handled his levers or peered intently through his lookout glass at the glittering threads of rail that spun toward him.

"By the piper!" screamed Sullivan, "she's moving as I'll bet she never did before. We ought to make Montreal in three hours if we can only keep the rails."

The fireman grunted, but did not lift his head from his work.

Montreal was still close on a hundred and fifty miles away, and Sullivan's estimate of reaching it in three hours was based on keeping up the speed at which they were then traveling.

On they rushed, through open prairie land, over culverts and bridges, between threatening walls of mighty cuttings, through giant gorges, and, anon, along a shelf on the wall of a great mountain pass, overhanging chasmic depths.

Safely through all they hurried on, leaping forward to perils that no other driver would have dared face on such an engine at such a speed.

In the general manager's car, Jim Harvey passed the time impatiently.

The cook and porter, panic-stricken at first by the pace at which Sullivan was driving an old freight engine, had become somewhat reconciled to it as the miles flew by and no accident had happened.

It was five minutes to eleven by the station clock at Montreal when Sullivan pulled into the terminus. Jim Harvey stepped painfully out of the car, and while the porter ran to get him a hack he went up to the engine to give Sullivan a grip of thanks.

"Do you think you're in time?" asked Sullivan anxiously. "I got the best I could out of the old kettle without getting her red hot."

"Can just do it, I think," replied Jim, and hurried away to the waiting vehicle.

He had told his driver to make a dash for the courthouse when a motor car swept up to the station. The general manager sprang out.

"Too late for Black Michaels," he said. "The scoundrel was brought up half an hour ago and discharged for lack of evidence. But I'm glad to see you alive, Jim. After all, that's the only thing that matters."

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### MAN TO MAN.

Sullivan, of the Freight Patrol—Big Sullivan, as the men called him, for his giant frame and mighty strength—leaned against the side of a box car in the South Side freight yards. He was puzzled, and was thoughtfully wrestling with the situation that had given rise to his perplexity.

He was making his nightly round of the freight yards, always a troublesome and risky business, when he was brought up short by the amazing discovery that two of the patrolmen were missing.

Impatient at this slackness, Sullivan stepped to a box car and rattled the door. This was his usual signal to his men, and in the ordinary way it would have been immediately followed by the appearance of the freight guard.

A growl of anger expressed his feelings when another minute passed and he still found himself alone.

A second and very peremptory rattle of the door showed that Sullivan's patience was rapidly failing him; two more minutes of futile waiting exhaust-

ed it, and he strode determinedly into the gloom ahead of him, chewing his wrath.

"By the piper! Some one will suffer for this," he muttered.

He was convinced now that some extraordinary breach of discipline had occurred, for he argued that nothing less than a raid by train pirates could account for the absence of two men.

In such an event, shots should have been fired, and these would have brought the two patrolmen from the other end of the yards, half a mile distant.

It was when his utmost efforts to find the missing men had proved unavailing that he leaned against the box car and tried to solve the mystery of their disappearance.

Unwilling though he was to admit it even to himself, Sullivan was forced to the conclusion that the men had proved unworthy of the trust he had placed in them, and had deserted the patrol—perhaps after robbing the cars themselves.

To prove that his theory of desertion and robbery was correct there should be a looted car among the freight in his immediate neighborhood.

This would be indisputable evidence, and he determined to suspend judgment on the missing men until he had found it. To make ready for the search, he unbuttoned his coat and drew out the electric lantern he carried beneath it.

He flashed this once to make sure that it was in order, then he shifted his feet so as to face the cars and begin his inspection of them.

As if the electric flash had been a signal arranged for, there was a quick, muffled movement on the top of the car against which he had been leaning.

Sullivan's ready ears caught the sound, and as he stepped back and looked up to find the meaning of it, he whipped his hand to his revolver. But his hand did not reach the weapon, for a soft, thick cloth or blanket suddenly descended on his head, and, while he clutched it with both hands and struggled wildly to free himself from its

folds, he heard a low whistle, and a heavy body crashed on top of him and hurled him violently to the ground.

Sullivan made a mighty effort to fling off the man who had dropped on him from the roof of the car, but the clinging folds of the cloth that enmeshed him hampered his limbs.

In an instant he was pinned to the ground by two men, and, though he struggled furiously against it, the cloth was wrapped round his head.

He struck out wildly, but his terrible blows were spent on the air; he writhed and kicked madly, but his blind attacks were easily dodged by his captors.

Deprived of air, and almost strangled by the tightened cloth, lights flashed violently before his eyes, and he fell with his captors on top of him, his strength expired.

The thick covering on his head was loosened a moment later, and with a heave of his great chest he drew in a welcome gulp of fresh air.

But already his arms were bound fast, and if he would have resisted he could not, but he looked up with unflinching eyes at the man who faced him.

The mask was no concealment to his shrewd eyes. He could not mistake the tall, powerful figure of the leader of the train pirates, with his swarthy skin and fierce, black mustache.

A prod in the ribs from the other man's revolver warned Sullivan that he was expected to walk on, and the threatening expression on Black Michaels' face gave him wisdom to obey rather than be shot like a dog.

So they progressed through the gloomy freight yards, past the line of loaded freight cars, while Black Michaels maintained an unbroken silence and allowed all Sullivan's taunts to go unanswered.

At last the Irishman recalled the mystery of the two missing patrolmen, a mystery to which he believed Black Michaels held the key.

To test this, he sarcastically advised the train pirate to get his business done quickly lest the patrol should interfere with him. This was effectual.

It was Black Michaels' turn to taunt. "Your patrol will have plenty to do to look after itself," he said, with a grim, mocking smile. "I've trapped two beside you to-night; I'll take the rest when I want them."

In spite of his own perilous case, Sullivan was distinctly relieved to find that his suspicions of his men's loyalty were unfounded. He could not blame them for being captured by the train pirates when he also had fallen a victim to them.

He felt sure, however, that Black Michaels' plans that night were laid solely to make him a prisoner and avenge his son's death.

Further speculation on this matter was interrupted by a sight on the tracks ahead of him that sent the blood surging through his veins with the wild hope that help was at hand.

A light had suddenly flared out of the darkness and as suddenly vanished. Instantly he knew the meaning of it. It was the glow from the fire of an engine, shown for a moment while the fire was being stoked.

But the hope was short-lived, for as they approached he saw that the engine was in the hands of two masked men—members of Black Michaels' gang.

"This is where we want your help," he heard Michaels say. "The driver of this engine was foolish enough to resist us, and he got hurt. We want to take a couple of cars of freight about twenty miles along the line, where we can unload them without bother. You'll drive the engine for us."

"I'll see you in Timbuctoo before I do!" cried Sullivan hotly.

"You'll drive the engine," said Black Michaels calmly.

"I'll not," snapped Sullivan, setting his jaws obstinately.

Black Michaels approached Sullivan threateningly.

"Get into the cab," he ordered sharply; "we'll cut your arms free there, and you'll get to work on the engine or be shot."

"Save your breath," answered Sullivan, still defiant. "I'll not drive that

engine for you, so you can get on with your shooting. I thought you were a man, but you're just a poor skunk."

"Say that again," said Black Michaels between his teeth.

"I will. You're no man. You dropped me once with your hand, but I'm a better man than you, and you know it, or you wouldn't fear to face me without a gun."

Sullivan saw that he had at last pierced Black Michaels' indifference to his taunts, and he was playing desperately to irritate him still further.

Instinctively, he felt that he had struck the right chord in the man's nature, for, like many strong men, the train pirate was inordinately proud of his physical prowess, and angrily resented any aspersion on it. His lips twitched with ill-concealed rage as he listened to the Irishman's tirade.

"Cut loose my arms, and stand up to me like a man," yelled Sullivan. "I'll bate the head off you in two minutes. If I bate you, your men can carry you off, but if you are the better man I'll drive the engine to wherever you like to name."

"D'ye mean that?" interjected Black Michaels, his eyes flashing fiercely. "You'll drive the engine and take what's coming to you after if I show you I'm the better?"

"That's it," said Sullivan scornfully; "but you daren't risk it."

Black Michaels' reply was prompt. He handed his revolver to one of his men, then with his own hands cut Sullivan's bonds and stood before him unarmed.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### THE FIGHT.

A flat, cinder-strewn piece of ground about ten yards to the side of the tracks was selected for the fight. Then, naked to their waists, they faced each other, while the three train thieves stood by the lantern, watching them with fierce eagerness.

Sullivan, maddened now by the lust of fighting, was the first to take the aggressive. With a crouching move-



ment he drew toward the train pirate and fainted at his head, meaning to follow up this move with a crashing body blow.

He got an unpleasant surprise, for, as his left arm shot out, Black Michaels made no effort to avoid it, but sprang at him with the swiftness of a tiger, caught the right-arm blow with his left, and struck him with terrific force on the chin.

It was a precisely similar blow that had knocked him over in the South Side yards, and, though he did not fall this time, he staggered back, and his arms flew up wildly.

Luckily his right arm diverted the blow with which Black Michaels followed up this attack, and the Irishman danced away, shaking his bearded head with pain.

With his eyes gleaming like live coals, Black Michaels darted after him, but Sullivan had had his lesson, and, though his pride suffered in doing it, he nimbly retreated and contented himself with merely guarding his head until he recovered his shaken senses.

Presently he ventured to make a stand, but already his ribs were feeling sore from the blows the train pirate had showered on them.

Black Michaels, breathing heavily with his exertions, was taking matters easily for a moment.

Sullivan, whose mighty shoulders shone with ivory whiteness in the wan, uncertain moonlight, watched his opponent keenly.

Flitting back and forward through the lantern rays in his peculiar crouching attitude, he circled round Black Michaels with light, springy steps.

Twice he got through his guard, and landed stinging blows on the train pirate's ribs, but, with an elusiveness that made Black Michaels set his jaws viciously, he slipped out of reach of the returns.

He was cool and cautious now, sobered by that first dreadful blow, and was waiting watchfully for a repetition of the lightning rush that had caught him napping then. Soon it came, and

with it a howl of frantic excitement from the men who watched.

He had thrown out a lure of counterfeit carelessness, and in a flash Black Michaels leaped for him and shot out his right fist for the mark he had reached before.

This time the Irishman was not there; he had sidestepped craftily, and as his terrible opponent swept past, he struck him under the heart with all the strength he could command. His blow was shrewdly delivered, and as he felt it land he yelled with wild elation.

A gasp of agony burst from Black Michaels; with his arms hanging limp, he lurched sideways and fell in a heap.

As Black Michaels collapsed, two of his gang rushed at Sullivan, and it seemed then that his victory had served him little.

But before the infuriated thieves reached him, the crack of a rifle rang out, and a bullet whizzed across the lantern-lit space. A shout that followed this told Sullivan that help had come to him at last.

Dismayed, but loyal to their chief, the train pirates ran to Black Michaels and lifted him in their arms. One of them smashed the lantern with a kick and extinguished it.

Ten seconds later, when Robert Payne and three others of the Freight Patrol arrived on the cinder-strewn patch of ground, they found Sullivan alone, calmly putting on his shirt and coat.

While Payne hastily explained how he and his comrade had been bound and gagged within earshot of where Sullivan was trapped, and how they had eventually got free and followed him, the Irishman, from the tail of his eye, was watching certain black patches that were receding through the gloom.

It went hard with him to see Black Michaels escape, when at last he had him in the hollow of his hand, but he had given his word that his men could carry him off if he were beaten. It was a fair fight, man to man, and for that night a truce must be observed.

But the fight had a more serious result than Black Michaels' escape, for

Jim Harvey, taking his lieutenant to task for letting the gang leader get away, managed to offend the hot-headed Irishman so seriously that he then and there resigned from the patrol, and, disdaining Jim's attempt at reconciliation, banged out of the office.

By a curious twist of his mind, Sullivan had grown to regard the war on the freight thieves as a personal feud between himself and Black Michaels, and he looked on it that to go back to his engine while Black Michaels was still at large was to acknowledge himself beaten. He found offense even in the suggestion, and thrust it from his mind with disgust.

"He'd think I was afraid of him," he muttered.

When he left Jim Harvey's office, Sullivan was firmly determined to cut himself adrift from the patrol, but when he realized that he could not honorably reconcile himself to taking this step he was in somewhat of a quandary.

Ignorant of Jim's actual feelings toward him, he could not make up his mind to knuckle under by reporting that evening at headquarters as if nothing unusual had happened, and yet he could hit on no way of evading this sacrifice of dignity unless by deserting the patrol. He was still seeking an escape from this dilemma when he hesitated at the choice of two roads, and then came the inspiration that sent him hurrying southward.

*Why not try to track down Black Michaels single-handed?*

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### SULLIVAN ON THE TRAIL.

It was this thrilling thought that made Sullivan forget all else and set his blood tingling with the hope that luck might help him to some daring coup which would place Black Michaels at his mercy and enable him to emerge in a blaze of glory from his temporary eclipse.

He remembered it was rumored that Black Michaels was in hiding on the South Side, and it was there that he meant to look for him. It was proba-

ble, almost certain, that the man moved freely among the low tenement dwellers of the neighborhood, secure in the knowledge that his spies would warn him of any threatening movement on the part of the police.

Sullivan knew well how almost impossible it was to arrest a criminal in this district, where at the first show of official force the evildoers took alarm and ran to their dens like rabbits scampering to their burrows; but he had strong hopes that he could venture alone into this thieves' sanctuary without attracting particular attention to himself or arousing suspicion of his errand.

If all went well he might track Black Michaels to his lair, or, better still, catch him unprepared for resistance, and drag him from his stronghold at the point of his revolver. It was a desperate venture, and Sullivan knew that he carried his life in his hands in attempting it; but he saw a chance of success in the very boldness of his design, and it was not in his nature to be deterred by odds.

When he reached the outskirts of the tenement district that was supposed to harbor Black Michaels, Sullivan flung away the end of his cigar and drew from his pocket a stumpy, black pipe. He paused to fill and light this, and when he resumed his progress his cap was canted rakishly over his left eye, his hands were stuck in his coat pockets, and he was walking with a rolling, shuffling gait that was appropriate to the neighborhood.

A reckless, lawless ruffian he looked as he shouldered his way carelessly through the mean, ill-paved, malodorous streets of outlawry.

Lest he should betray himself, he dared make no inquiries; he knew that the faintest breath of suspicion would be fatal to his chances of success. His only hope was that luck might befriend him and enable him to gather a hint of Black Michaels' movements.

But neither in the saloons, where he freely bought drinks for thirsty scoundrels, nor in the streets and alleys, where he sometimes leaned idly against a wall amid a group of loafers, did he

pick up the smallest crumb of information.

Beyond a piece of waste land ahead of him he could see the ten-foot wall of the freight yard. He had left the streets behind him, and the only habitations in front of him were the row of tenements on the east side of the tracks.

These houses lay between him and the wall, and he had to pass them and walk a considerable distance to get onto the line, or else climb the wall in the manner of the freight thieves intent on a raid. To save time he resolved to climb the wall.

The row of tenement houses was on his right hand when he got within a hundred yards of the wall. As he drew abreast of them he glanced casually along the front of the houses, and noticed indifferently that the only human beings in sight were two men who were standing outside a house near the middle of the row.

He would have passed on without giving them further attention, but that, as he was shifting his glance from them, a third man emerged from the house they stood by and joined them.

As this man moved into full view, Sullivan gave a sharp gasp of amazement, and halted as though he had been swiftly petrified.

*It was Black Michaels.*

Sullivan was so astounded that for several seconds he stood open-mouthed, staring at him.

Luckily he recovered his presence of mind before the men turned toward him, and stepped stealthily back until the end house of the row concealed him from them.

After a brief parley the men turned and walked smartly in his direction, but when they were not more than a score of yards from him, something happened that almost startled him into premature action.

There was an ominous halt, and he feared that he had betrayed himself by involuntarily exposing his head or shoulder beyond the projecting wall.

In his perilous indecision his ears saved him from blundering. He could still hear the men talking, and he quick-

ly gathered that it was for no reason in which he was concerned that they had halted.

A few seconds later the sound of approaching footsteps aroused him to renewed alertness, and then, while he listened, he realized with dismay that there was only one man approaching him.

Two distinct sets of sounds were carried to his ears; those growing louder each moment were the steps of a solitary man, while the others were the receding steps of his companions.

The man swung round the corner of the house, saw Sullivan, and took a hasty pace to the right to avoid collision with him. As he did so he glanced incuriously at the lazy-looking figure against the wall.

Sullivan returned the idle scrutiny with a careless gaze. He knew already that the man was not Black Michaels, and he was anxious to be rid of him, but as his eyes met the other's he saw the casual glance become sharply purposeful and the pupils of the eyes dwindle almost to pin points.

Instantly he knew that he was recognized and that nothing but prompt and desperate action would prevent the neighborhood being raised about his ears. In a twinkling he flung out his right arm, and before the man could utter a sound the revolver butt had crashed onto his head and laid him at Sullivan's feet with a cracked skull.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### THE LAST STAND.

Sullivan stood threateningly over the prone figure until he realized that the man was no longer a menace to him; then he glanced swiftly about to make sure that he was still unobserved, and, leaving the unconscious thief to take his chance of being discovered by his friends, hurried forward in chase of Black Michaels.

He saw the train pirate and his remaining companion walking slowly to the wall of the freight yard; already they were more than halfway across



the tract of waste land that divided the wall and the row of houses.

Black Michaels' companion was already at the top of the wall, and Michaels himself was in the act of climbing it, when Sullivan's voice rang out in the harsh command:

*"Hands up, Black Michaels!"*

As the ominous words cleaved the still air, the train pirate fell from the wall like a stone, landing on the ground in a crouching position.

As he rose he spun round, a little splash of flame darted from his right hand, and Sullivan felt a hot stab of pain in his left shoulder. Michaels had chanced a snapshot and found a mark.

Forcing back a cry of pain, Sullivan pressed the trigger of his revolver, but his wound, slight as it was, had shaken his aim, and the shot was wasted. A second shot from his enemy whizzed dangerously past his head; again he fired, but missed, and the soft-nosed bullet sprayed against the wall, driving Black Michaels' henchman to shelter in the freight yard.

Before he fired again, Black Michaels sprang like a cat for the wall, and in a second was astride it. A bullet shattered his left hand against the stone he gripped, but before he dropped out of sight he thrust out his gun again and aimed steadily for Sullivan's running figure, and the patrolman tumbled headlong, almost to the base of the wall, with a bullet through his left thigh.

For a moment or two he lay babbling out his raging disappointment like a crying child, when suddenly the crack-crack of a couple of pistol shots beyond the wall cut short his bitter lamentations, for in a flash he remembered the patrolmen on duty there, and he was gripped by the wild hope that they had brought Black Michaels to bay.

The thought nerved him to desperation. Despite the terrible pain he suffered, he strove to reach the wall. Inch by inch he dragged himself forward; at last one of his hands touched the wall, and with the reserve of his flagging strength he raised himself until he stood erect. The worst of his desperate

task was before him, for the ten-foot wall that still stood in the way of his desires was, in his maimed condition, almost an insuperable obstacle.

If it had not been that the wall at this point had suffered from the inroads of the freight thieves, so that gaps and projections made it ladderlike, the thing he had set himself to accomplish would have been impossible.

With unconquerable resolution, he saw that his revolver was safely bestowed in his belt; then, while he supported himself against the wall, he raised his arms until he found a grip that enabled him to draw his right leg to a foothold.

Foot by foot he worked his way to the top, his teeth gritted to suppress his groans, and his brow dripping the sweat of agony.

Shouts and a pistol shot as he looked over into the freight yard told him that the conflict was still in progress, but the noise of these was almost drowned by a train of empty freight cars that was rattling through.

Lying almost at length on the stonework, his rapidly dimming eyes sought Black Michaels. To his right he saw a wounded patrolman vainly trying to struggle to his feet. Not far from him a second patrolman was engaged in a fierce struggle with one of the thieves.

As his eyes still wandered despairingly in search of Black Michaels, he saw that two other men of the patrol were running swiftly to the scene of the fight; and then, at last, he saw his terrible enemy.

It was plain that Black Michaels had also seen the approach of reinforcements, for at the moment that Sullivan caught sight of him he was dashing for one of the open cars of the freight train that was passing.

He reached the car, and with his right hand gripped it. While he prepared to swing to safety the last shot of the fight rang out. It was fired by Sullivan in his last conscious effort.

The bullet struck Black Michaels in the right shoulder. The outlaw grasped blindly at the car, swayed inward, and

fell, to have his life crushed out under the heavy, grinding wheels.

Until long afterward Sullivan did not know that his despairing shot had ended the war between the train pirates and the Freight Patrol.

As he pressed the trigger of his revolver, he fell from the top of the wall, and was picked up by the patrolmen, inert and unconscious, with a broken collar bone added to his injuries.

Two months in hospital set him on his feet again, but when Jim Harvey offered him the command of the Freight Patrol he refused to accept it.

"Not for me," he said, but there was no bitterness or ill feeling in his words.

"If it's all the same to you, I'd rather go back to my engine. Now Black Michaels is gone, there'll be nothing but routine work for the boys; but, by the piper!" he added, with a reflective gleam in his eyes, "he was a fighter and kept us busy when he was alive."

To Robert Payne then came promotion to the vacant command. Jim Harvey was wanted elsewhere; a new superintendent of motive power was needed on the line, and the general manager could find no better man to fill the position than Jim Harvey.

Jim had been through the mill and proved himself, and now at last the way was clear to the goal of his ambition.

THE END.

# The Enchanted House

By Winthrop Curtis

It's all very well for a professional wizard to do funny stunts with nature, but  
when an amateur tries to play sorcerer his magic is  
quite apt to run amuck

THE four friends had just finished dinner.

Dawson, Peters, and Cogswell had tilted their chairs back against the wall, and were quietly smoking cigarettes.

Congdon was lying on a couch opposite, occasionally taking a long drag at a black meerschaum. He had just started a story—one of those stories which men relate as they sit about the table after a good dinner.

The smoke which hung in rifts about halfway to the ceiling made their faces look blue and hazy as though seen through a fog. Little sparks glistened in the dark part of the gaslight, as the clouds of smoke came in contact with it.

The room was a fairly large one, decorated in the best style of the seventies. The lofty coffered ceiling was richly ornamented with heavy moldings and gilded stucco.

The low half of the walls was covered with thick oak paneling, while here

and there in every nook and crevice was some daintily carved device, which testified to the former grandeur of the place.

"There was an old Jew named Rosenbaum," Congdon was beginning, "who had a very pretty daughter, and a young traveling salesman was staying with them while he was in town—"

He suddenly found himself in darkness.

"Here, what did you put out the light for? That's a pretty way to treat a man when he's telling you a nice, funny story. Show me the son of a gun that did the deed," he added as he leaped to his feet.

No one answered him, but he heard a scuffling and pattering as of several people trying to leave the room quietly.

"You can't frighten me. Wait till I get the light lighted again."

He put one hand into his pocket for a box of matches, while with the other

he reached up to turn on the gas. He had scarcely touched the thumbscrew when a hand grasped his, and pulled it away. The hand was cold, very cold, and felt damp. He drew back with a shudder.

"What the devil are you fellows trying to do?" he demanded. "Give me the creeps? You've picked out the wrong man if you are. I don't scare that way."

Still no one answered, but there was the same scuffling sound which he had heard before.

Congdon pulled out his matches and struck one. As it flared up, he looked hurriedly about him. There was no one there.

He reached up to light the gas, and found to his amazement that it was turned on, and no gas was escaping. He turned it off, and devoted himself to a closer examination of the room.

The three chairs which his friends had occupied were still tilted up against the wall, but nobody was in them. Three half-smoked cigarettes lay close together in the ash tray, sending up a straight column of thick, blue smoke.

Aside from that everything was the same. The table littered with the remains of the dessert and the empty Chartreuse glasses, the buffet and its bottles of liqueurs, the side table where the carafe of Bordeaux stood, and the couch where he had been lying were all in their proper positions.

Nothing had been changed, except that his friends had disappeared and the gas would not run. Congdon was sure that it was some joke that his friends were playing on him; but, even at that, he felt a little uneasy.

He stooped down with another match, and glanced under the table. There was nothing there, except the hassocks on which they had rested their feet during the dinner. Then he took a step toward the door, and peered out into the dark hall.

"Oh, I say, fellows!" he called. "This is a child's trick to try and scare a fellow like this. Come on back, and let me finish my story."

There was no answer. He stood still

and listened, but the place seemed as silent as a tomb. Congdon was bored. He was in no mind for stumbling around the house with which he was unfamiliar, perhaps to step into a pail of water at the first turn, or fall into some similar hallowe'en trap.

He lighted another match and tried the gas once more. This time, as he held it over the jet, a rush of air blew it out.

"What childish nonsense is this?" he growled. "Peters is a regular kid to fix up his house with these hobgoblin tricks."

He was determined not to give his friends the satisfaction of thinking they had frightened him, however, so he threw himself on the couch to wait until they should grow tired and return.

He was drowsy after the hearty meal, and had been lying in a half-somnolent state for perhaps twenty minutes, when he became conscious that something was moving in the room.

He had his matches ready in his hand, and quickly struck one. It went out instantly, but in the brief space he saw something which made him start in spite of himself. Then he thought that it must have been an illusion.

When the light had flared up, it had seemed to him that he saw the chandelier vanish through the ceiling. Again he scratched a match. The chandelier was gone. Not only that, but every stick of furniture which the room had contained had vanished also. There was not even a picture on the wall.

By the light of a third match, he noticed that the doorknob had been removed. This discovery brought him to his feet. He tried to open the door by sticking his finger into the empty socket where the knob had been, but without avail.

He started back toward the couch, but in the darkness he missed it, and encountered the opposite wall with his groping hand. He ignited his next to the last match. The couch was gone!

Congdon was a man of strong nerves, but this silent disappearance of everything about him began to terrify him. He had been thoroughly convinced



from the first that it was one of his friend's practical jokes.

He told himself now that Peters, who had more money than he had time to spend in the ordinary way, had brought this out-of-the-way mansion, and fitted it up like a wizard's castle.

Yet try as he would to convince himself of this, the ghostly silence with which it had all transpired unmanned him.

"Come, this will never do, old man," he said to himself. "You'll have to take a brace."

He drew a cigar from his pocket, and was surprised to see how his hand trembled when he tried to insert the end into his patent cutter. He set his teeth into it savagely. Then he remembered that he had only one match left. He hesitated.

He was sure now that he wanted a smoke more than anything else in the world. Yet the thought of cutting himself off irrevocably from the possibility of seeing any new developments in his uncanny surroundings filled him with dread. His desire to smoke triumphed, however.

He carefully ignited the precious match, drew in a long, fragrant puff of the cigar, and then, as he glanced around the room, he felt all the courage go out of him at what he beheld.

When he had last seen it, the chamber had been a remarkably lofty one. Now he perceived by the feeble flickers of his dying match that the ceiling was scarce four feet above his head.

When he was once more in darkness, he raised his hand, and leaped into the air to make sure that he had not been mistaken. It struck against the ceiling with such force that he thought he had broken it.

A cry of pain escaped him, and the sound of it rang out so sharply in the dead silence about him that he stood still for several minutes nursing his injured hand.

At last, he raised it once more, and found that he could now touch the ceiling by standing on tiptoe. In a panic, he went over to the wall, and began feeling along it for the door.

He turned one corner, then another, a third, a fourth, and was back to the first again without having encountered anything but a smooth, unbroken surface.

Again he made the circuit of the room, but he found no evidence that there had ever been an exit of any kind. Now the roof of his prison was barely six inches above him.

He put both hands against it, and began to push up with all his might. He felt his temples throb, until he thought the blood vessels would burst, but his hands were slowly pushed down. In a few minutes he would be unable to stand upright.

Losing what little self-control he had left, he kicked and beat against the walls, crying out upon his friends for mercy. He continued this until he sank upon the floor from utter exhaustion.

When he tried to rise again, he bumped his head before he had gotten to his knees. The force of the blow stunned him, and he sank to the floor insensible.

A crashing sound like the thunder of waves rose and fell with regular and swift-recurring intervals on the misty borderland of consciousness. Then it stopped, and voices took its place.

Congdon felt himself dragged along the floor, and lifted into the air. The next he knew he was on a couch, and some one was holding a light close to his eyes. He choked as a great swallow of whisky was poured down his throat.

"That's all right, old man," said Peters, pushing him back as he tried to rise. Then as the stimulant began to take effect, he opened his eyes, and looked about him. He recognized the library of the house where he had dined.

Dawson and Peters were bending over him, and presently Cogswell entered with a physician. The latter gave him some medicine, and that was the last he knew till he awoke in the morning to find himself in bed.

Peters was in the room sitting by the window, and he came over and sat on the edge of the bed.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

"Why, all right. What's the matter?" replied Congdon. And then, as he stretched, and moved about: "I'm sore all over. What's happened?"

A minute later, he remembered, and Peters explained:

"I don't know how you can ever forgive me. I wouldn't blame you if you didn't. The man from whom I bought this house was a professional magician. When he quit the stage, he designed this place, and had it built for his own amusement. He called it the Enchanted House, and said that he had dominion over the spirits that inhabited it.

"As far as I have been able to find out there are only two rooms that are not full of secret panels and trapdoors. The room in which we had dinner last night he called the Chamber of Horrors.

"You have only to pull the levers on a switchboard to make all the furniture disappear, either piece by piece or in groups. As you probably noticed, the mechanism is so perfect that, when thoroughly oiled, it is absolutely noiseless.

"The old fellow used to get the incredulous into this room, and lead them on to boast that none of his magic could frighten them. Then he would start things going, and keep them going, until they cried out for mercy.

"There is a pump that draws the gas out of the pipes, and another which forces air into them. False walls rise up from the floor, shutting off the doors and windows. Then there is an infernal machine that lets down the ceiling.

"If there is any magic needed anywhere, it's in stopping that machine. The lever wouldn't do it last night. Beside the lever there is a gauge, which registers the height of the ceiling. You can imagine how we felt, when we saw it steadily going down, and heard you screaming, and couldn't stop it.

"Finally, in yanking on the lever, we pulled down the switchboard, so that we couldn't lower the false walls, and let you out the door. Then we started to smash the engine to pieces, but we couldn't find it.

"At last, when the room was about three feet high, we found a way to get in on top of it, and chopped a hole through the roof. We just managed to drag you out without being crushed to death. You had a terrible experience, and I can never forgive myself for what you must have suffered."

"I rather wish you had experimented on somebody else," said Congdon. "It was fierce. But I won't hold it against you, old man."

## Blasting for Brains

By James William Jackson

**It doesn't matter particularly how much brain is in a man's head, provided what he has is on the job**

THE boss carpenter had just pounded a query: "What's the difference between Tom Rastrick and an elephant?"

Rastrick's brown cheeks colored apprehensively as he rolled his sleeves up along a pair of muscular, young arms. He suspected that the answer would contain a prick.

Gus Merger, his big mouth expanded in a grin, hurried the solution with a shake of his head.

"An elephant," the foreman explained, somewhat impatiently, "keeps his brains handy at the top of his trunk; Rastrick hasn't any brains. Why in the name of common sense, Tom, did you dump these planks here?"

Rastrick glanced ruefully at the neatly arranged stack of flooring joists which he and the wagon driver had built over the gutter. The timbers might, in truth, have been more conveniently placed much nearer to the

new house for which they were intended.

"I—I didn't mean to put 'em here," Rastrick defended himself; "but——"

"Oh, 'but'!" the foreman interrupted, in a dryly conclusive tone; "you make your head thick butting so much."

Tom had been about to explain that the hurrying contractor himself, with perhaps more interest than judgment, had indicated where the timbers should be piled; but the foreman did not stay to hear.

It was a hopelessly crowded section of the street, anyway. Building materials for the new house littered the sidewalk and the gutter; a trench was being run for the water piping between the curb and the trolley track, and the excavated rock and earth added confusion worse confounded by brick piles, stone heaps, mortar beds, and sand dumps, to say nothing of the railroad ties which big Mat used in his blasts.

Gus Merger seemed to find a heap of teasing satisfaction in dwelling on the foreman's rebuke. He and Tom after a while had occasion to pass the pipe trench on their way for some timber to plate the newly finished cellar wall of the house. He drew the attention of the swarthy, red-shirted Mat to Rastrick.

"Chase this fellow away from the hole when you make a blast," he begged. "His mind is gone, and he might get hurt."

Tom squared for that a moment or so later. As they turned over the timbers on the pile, searching for a suitable length, he slid one piece neatly down onto Merger's toe. Gus let out a howl as he rubbed the injured foot up against the calf of his other leg.

Mat was climbing out of the trench after railroad ties to dump on top of his blast.

"Sounds like a weak-minded howl for a fact," he slyly commented, dodging the clod of earth which Merger hurled at him.

While the plate was being laid, Gus persisted in his solicitous concern for Rastrick's mental condition.

"They would give you good care up

at the Hillcrest Sanitarium for about five dollars a week," he informed Tom, "so long as you're not violent."

Tom trued up an end of the timber thoughtfully.

"My folks can afford to give me a little more expensive attention than you got, Gus," he replied, with a pensive smile, "and maybe effect a more permanent cure."

Mat and his helper by this time were announcing their readiness for a blast. In roughened, deep-toned voices, they lifted up a monotonous singsong of "Fire!" The helper, with a red flag, walked up toward the protection of the corner, while Mat lighted the fuse.

A careful housewife closed her front door quickly, taught by experience in the development of that rocky district. A shutter banged, a shrill voice anxiously summoned home a mislaid child, and a rumbling truck, obedient to the red flag, halted at the corner. All activities in the vicinity of the trench ceased unanimously.

The new house cellar afforded no protection to the foreman and his mechanics. They followed the others up around the corner. Gus tenderly insisted on leading his mate by the hand.

A gentle curl of smoke from the trench showed where the explosive forces gathered themselves. There was a moment of tickling suspense before the climax came; and then, with a roar that made every one duck enthusiastically for shelter, the blast went off.

The contents of the trench heaved and boiled like the bursted deck of a sinking ship. The railroad timbers were lifted as on the swell of a heavy sea to the street level, and fell back again with sulky weight.

The ragged blanket of old bags was shot to fragments; and, as the earth seemed suddenly to split, a spouting stream of grape and canister rock went high in the air. Rastrick heard the rain of small stones on the adjacent roofs.

"You'll blow somebody's head off first thing you know, Mat," he laughingly observed to the burly blaster as the



workers drifted back. Mat was thrifty in a way.

It was a time-consuming operation to load an explosion with much bagging and many ties; so he took chances on the minimum amount of precaution.

But he mildly resented Tom's strictures.

"Some people's heads is no good, anyway," he growled comfortably; "so what's the difference?"

Gus was apparently afraid Rastrick would miss the point of that.

"You shouldn't speak so roughly, Mat," he chided. "Tom has feelings if he hasn't any brains."

The various tasks were soon under way again. Rastrick and Gus proceeded with the work of making fast the plate in readiness for joists; the rhythmic ring of Mat's drill was heard preparing for another explosion. The one just set off had not been wholly satisfactory; the chief blaster promised a "good one" next time.

The foreman had gone off on a short errand, leaving the two young fellows to work alone. Chaffering subsided for the time being. When the plate was fixed, the pair went up toward the head of the trench to carry down joists.

By the time some twenty of them had been shifted to the house and laid on the walls, Mat and his helper were raising their warning cry once more. The helper wigwagged his flag as the ding-dong of a coming trolley car was heard from up around the corner.

Croaking "Fire!" like a bullfrog, Mat crawled out of the trench. He hastened away as the black fender of the trolley poked into sight at the turn. Rastrick had stopped to snatch a drink from the temporary hydrant used for mortar mixing.

The car swung the corner in defiance of the red flag. It afterward developed that the trolley was late and due to connect from the hill country with a train in the valley.

It was apparent to the motorman that the fuse had only just been lighted; and he was tempted to get by on a spurt without further loss of time.

Mat yelled a guttural rebuke, and went on his way, muttering. Rastrick, turning off the hydrant, observed the purposed dash, and shook his head disapprovingly.

"I'll have to hunt up that motorman later," he told himself, with a chuckle. "We'll form an organization of ourselves. He hasn't any more sense than they say I have."

All things being equal, of course, the car would have gone by safely; but that is the shifty sand of theorizing on which many disasters are founded.

The gesticulated flag and Mat's booming tones were of avail only in rousing the motorman to haste. He threw on full power, and the car gave a leaping jump.

Possibly a scrap of wood or stone from the cluttered street had drifted onto the track; in any event, the burst of speed was unfortunate. With a bound the car left the line.

Rastrick was just about to scurry away when he heard the grating sound of heavy wheels on the paving blocks. The motorman was wildly manipulating levers and brakes. The passengers, rising in fright from their seats, were unceremoniously tumbled back again by the swaying of the car as it listed, ripped, and sidled along its unaccustomed course.

Rastrick's heart came up to meet the apple in his throat when he perceived the tragedy which impended. Shivering as if it comprehended the fate in store, the car staggered on a down grade straight toward the smoldering trench.

In a moment more it would settle, like a hen on her nest, over pent-up forces capable of blowing it inside out.

The car, a summer type with cross-wise aisles, gyrated wildly. The passengers clung at undignified angles to the creaking seats, and uttered feminine cries of distress or masculine yells of dismay.

One old lady gripped a side stanchion fearfully. A couple of children, scrounging up their half-stockinged legs, held each other close, and began to cry.

Rastrick drew a quick breath between his teeth as he thought of what

would happen when the car crashed into the nearly filled hole.

The blast would go with a roaring detonation and a convulsive throe. A gushing fountain of rocks would rise high in the air, and a second later the clearing smoke would unveil dreadful consequences.

But no one can exactly prognosticate the instant of a fuse blast. It had not come yet, and Rastrick leaped up street with bounding strides. After lingering so long in the vicinity, he had planned to escape in the other direction.

As he changed his purpose now, he might be, for all he knew, hastening toward the blast only to add one more to the list of fatalities.

It seemed to his excited fancy that the trench was already bulging for a heave that would knock his head off his shoulders. Then he remembered, with a sensation of humor gone sick, so to speak, that Mat said some heads didn't matter.

To the blasting crew and Merger a "fire" was commonplace. They had withdrawn ten or twenty feet around the corner, to avoid the glaring sun in which they worked all day.

The crunching of the derailed car, however, brought them out of the shady spot on the run. They reached the corner as Tom sprang for the pile of joists.

From that point Rastrick faced the car over his starboard bow, as it were, and the trench to port. If the joist stack had been a boat, he could have drifted broadside on in front of the car, which was racing over the last twenty feet to reach the hole.

As it was he literally hurled himself against the planks. Originally there had been some sixty pieces of timber in the pile.

A third of them had been carried to the house, however, and the remainder, a more or less unstable heap five feet in height, crashed away at his impetuous attack.

The planks strewed the ground in a barrier before the car, which came to a sudden, screeching stop as the timbers jammed its wheels.

The toppling load carried Rastrick over with it, and apparently roused the blast into activity. There was an instant, quivering throb, a crackling boom, and a hail of stones through a gaseous vapor.

Screams of terror saluted the spouting missiles which, thwarted of their chance to go through the car, now rained thunderingly down upon it.

A clatter of broken glass told of a window gone across the street. Rastrick, crouching close to the earth, felt the sting of pelting rocks all over his body.

One struck him in the head. But he pressed back the pain with a soothing hand, and climbed to his feet. Mat and his helper came running down at once, Merger and the returned foreman behind him.

No one in the car had been seriously hurt. The foreman gave his anxious attention to the young mechanic, white-faced and trembling, rather from the effort than because of his injury.

Tom smiled up into the frowningly worried face of the chief, and waved aside sympathy.

"It's nothing," he avowed, as he nursed the bump, "though it hurts as much as if I had brains in there."

"Brains!" the foreman repeated gravely. "Well, boy, if you haven't much brains, at least what you have you've got with you."

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## Two of a Kind

SEEING a tramp hurrying away from a large house, a fellow professional asked him what luck he had met with.

"It ain't wort' askin' there," was the reply. "I jest had a peep through the winder. It's a poverty-stricken house, bo. There was acshully two ladies playin' on one pianner!"

# The Priceless Six

By Alfred Judd

If ever an author gave you a whirl of events, Mr. Judd has done so in this remarkable story. But with a calm mind and steady hand he has set it all down, so that for the reader there is a quiet but none the less stirring tale.

(COMPLETE NOVELETTE)

## CHAPTER I.

### MIDNIGHT INTRUDERS.

NOW, what's to be done! Is this a case of being just in time—or am I just too late? Three of them, too. This will require some smart tackling!"

The situation certainly looked a little desperate. Cawthorne Park is a big, lonely residence standing in broad grounds well back from a road just north of White Plains.

Turning the last bend of the drive, Dick Stafford had found cause to slip softly into the cover of the chestnuts, for on the terrace before him were the figures of three men, and their intentions seemed obvious.

Moving furtively up and down, they were testing each window in turn—stepping back now and again to inspect the upper casements.

Stafford deliberated. It would take him a certain twenty minutes to get help of any sort—perhaps half an hour. What a fool he had been to leave this great house shut up and unprotected! His friends had told him so.

"If you must be a bachelor," they had said, "and have no wish to use your late uncle's place, then why in the world keep it at all? Sell the house, my dear man—and sell its contents. If you don't——"

To which, with cheerfulness, the heir had always replied:

"Oh, I sleep there nearly every night, you know. It's quite all right. To sell it would be to regret it—I'm sure of that."

And here was the sequel. Stafford,

buttoning his coat, moved stealthily yet rapidly through the chestnuts. There was certainly no time to lose—and his mind was settled. He would make the defense single-handed—but he would conduct it from within.

There was a revolver in the study upstairs. From a vantage point on the first landing he ought to be able to give these night birds a warm reception.

Unseen, Stafford gained the lee of the conservatory. Passing around this, he slipped through the syringas and made a bold descent on the side door. Whipping out his keys, he let himself into the dark house, locked the door again, and quietly slid the bolt.

Reaching the hall, he paused an instant to listen. Stealthy sounds progressed on the frontage without. The enemy, plainly, were still in quest of the most vulnerable spot. Stafford went up the carpeted staircase in fleet fashion, and so along to the study door. Next moment he was within the utterly shadowed room.

"Good!" he murmured; "or, rather—good so far. Now to organize that warm reception. My brand-new six-shooter, I think, will be found in the drawer of the writing table. Shall I need to scratch a match, or——"

Nearing the position of the table, Stafford thrust forth an arm to grope in front. Instantly his fingers came in contact with—a human face! His hand fell as he started back, and a chill quiver seemed to flash down his spine.

His hand in descending had brushed the shoulder belonging to the face. And now, involuntarily clenching his fist, he felt that his fingers were viscidly damp.



"Who's there?" he spoke out sharply.

No reply—the room was uncannily still. Stafford hunted for his matches. His shaking fingers struck one presently, and the flame danced up.

In the chair at the writing table was stretched the body of a man—a man who was seemingly dead. His age might have been thirty-five, his features well cut—upturned and pallid—and with a dark yet delicate mustache.

A coat and an overcoat had been discarded. His right shirt sleeve, about the shoulder, was ruddily stained—though an essay had been made to swathe the hurt with a handkerchief.

The match went out. Stafford used another and lit a lamp. Not unnaturally, he was feeling a little nervous. To come home in the early hours and to find a trio of cracksmen hovering about one's portal is bad enough, but to enter a fully-locked abode and to discover a dead man sitting in one's private chair is a little too much. To say the least, it is bewildering.

But was this man dead? Stafford caught up one of the listless wrists, and he had his answer at once. The pulse was still at work—it was merely a case of swooning.

At the moment of gathering this, Stafford heard a crash on the ground floor. The storming party had risked everything, and had made their advent through the glass.

## CHAPTER II.

### BESIEGED.

For a moment, as the startling sound shattered the stillness of the big house, Stafford stood quite still; then, snatching out a drawer, he pulled forth his revolver, and started for the stairs.

As suddenly he halted—glancing round. What should he do? Here was a fellow creature, no matter how mysteriously arrived, needing urgent attention. He should have it. The marauders, for the time being, must do their worst.

Stafford made fast the study door and carried his keys swiftly across the

room. There he employed them to open a cabinet.

The decanter of brandy which Stafford produced he bore to the motionless figure, and poured some of the raw spirit between the parted lips. He did more. In the same cupboard was a water jug—nearly full, and with the contents of this he doused the white face again and again.

For the next three minutes he kept up a running, watery assault, and it was not without result. Presently the unknown showed signs of reviving—he stirred slightly, and his eyelids fluttered.

There were wary steps on the stairs. Stafford's patient struggled weakly and unclosed his eyes—and a vigorous thumping upon the door occurred simultaneously.

"Within, there—open!" rang a peremptory voice.

"Without, there—who are you?" retorted Stafford.

The reply was not immediate. Though Stafford did not know it, these sons of darkness were a little taken aback. Before his coming, they had encompassed the dwelling more than once, and had taken the precaution to ring the hall bell.

Their conclusions had been that this building was certainly vacant as regards any usual tenants. Their reply to Stafford now was in the form of another question:

"Is Monsieur Dufroy with you?"

"I am sorry, but I haven't the pleasure of knowing Monsieur Dufroy. This is my house. And unless you make pretty quick tracks, I'll show you that I am able to look after it!"

Another short pause; then: "Monsieur Dufroy is within—we are convinced that he is within. We are armed and we are prepared to do more than threaten. Unless you give him up to us at once, we will break down the barrier! What do you say to that?"

"I say that you had better try it on. I've got a gun here, and the first man to strike that door will get a bullet for his trouble. The oak, though good, is not so thick but I may rattle a shot through."

The response to that was as arousing as it was instantaneous. The enemy, as it were, took the words from Stafford's mouth, and flung them back at him.

There was a shattering report, a sizing of splintered wood, and a twang above the mantelshef. A rich majolica plaque came showering to the floor in a dozen pieces.

"You hounds!" roared Stafford in a fury. "Do that again, and you'll get as good as you give—and something a trifle better!"

Gripping the swivel chair in which the stranger still crouched, Stafford dragged him as he was to the most retired corner.

Where they were now, the angle of the wall was such that no shots launched from the corridor could possibly touch them. Stafford, in words of strident wrath, announced this to the dogged besiegers.

But the latter—with the object, maybe, of precipitating matters—thought fit to keep things stirring. Having put through another pellet, which made the plaster fly from the frame of a Meissonier, they charged upon the woodwork until it groaned again.

Stafford had had about enough. Though still a club-lunching bachelor, he had lately developed the pride of home, and this free-shooting affray rather piqued him.

It is far from heartening to stand by and see one's *objets d'art*, recently inherited, being split like bottles at a shooting gallery, and it is still less gratifying to witness the structure itself being bent about one's ears.

Stafford was going to protect his chattels somehow. Panther-footed, he strode to a place precisely opposed to the entrance. Putting his revolver exactly toward a panel, he let the lead sing through.

A roar went up as in concert—a roar of dismay rather than of suffering. The bullet, as the belligerents hunched to their task, had probably whistled between their straining necks.

They realized, with inspiring suddenness, that the shooting chances were

all with the doughty garrison. They raised the siege at once, and stampeded down the stairs.

### CHAPTER III.

#### A COWARD'S RUSE.

Stafford felt at liberty to turn to the man in the chair.

"Am I to understand that you are the person for whom these gentlemen are so plaintively inquiring?"

"Yes," said the other weakly, "I am Louis Dufroy."

"And how in this world of wonders did you manage to get here?"

"I came through the trapdoor in the roof."

Stafford gasped. A little more of this sort of thing, and he felt that his senses would reel from him. His visitor, clearly, must have missed his footing and dropped out of paradise.

The details, he conceived, might be interesting; but, before he was permitted to solicit them, the other had made an acute movement, and was peering wildly around.

"Cicely!" he breathed; "where is Cicely Craig?"

"Cicely Craig!"

"Yes, a young girl—my wife's sister." There was fear in the speaker's eyes. "Was she not here when you arrived?"

"No, you were alone—and in the dark. Also, you were quite insensible."

"Ah, I fainted—I recollect. Cicely must have left the room—maybe she has gone for assistance."

"Let us hope she has. There is a little bolted door right at the back of the house through which she may have slipped. We appear to be sharing a tight crevice—you and I. If these gentry are half as desperate as they seem——"

"They are desperate. One of them—a big, black-bearded rascal named Vienney—is one of the worst in France. If—— Ah, what is that?"

There had been a hubbub below them—a hubbub speedily followed by a new ascent of the stairway.

"They are coming again!" exclaimed

the man in the chair—and his hand darted to pluck up his coat.

He brought forth a Russia wallet, and from between its folds a heavy linen envelope.

"This is what they are after," he whispered; "can you conceal it for me? Where they are not likely to look!"

Stafford glanced keenly about him. Good hiding places were few. His eyes fell on the floor covering. It was a fine Turkish rug, held down with brass-headed pins.

The stormers were at the door again when he snatched the packet from Dufroy's hands and slipped it beneath the corner of the carpet.

"Within, there!" called the same voice as before. "Will you permit us to join you now? Do not shoot. We have mademoiselle here, and we are holding her directly against the door!"

"You brutes!" gasped Dufroy.

"Shall we shoot mademoiselle, or will you open the door?"

Stafford did not wait for Dufroy's answer. Something like a stifled sob had reached him from the other side. He leaped across the room, unlocked the door, and flung it open.

## CHAPTER IV.

### A VILLAIN'S THREAT.

The way being cleared, there was an instant crowding in. The tallest scoundrel, pushing first, glanced swiftly around. He appeared, with satisfaction, to note that Stafford was the only man they had to reckon with.

"I hope monsieur will not further interfere," he suggested, in good English and with some silkiness. "We do not wish, from choice, to seem brutal—especially in the presence of a charming lady. Will monsieur consent to put down his weapon?"

Stafford glared at him first, then lifted his glance toward the girl who stood between the other two. Her sweetly fresh, American face stood out in pale, sharp contrast to the sallow, hard-lined features of two at least of her captors.

Stafford, deploring her presence in

such a plight, warred for a while with his natural impulses; then he wheeled deliberately, and, walking to the writing table, he flung down his revolver, and turned with folded arms.

"Well," he said, "state your villainy, and be done with it. What do you want?"

"Our wants are simple. First, as to a certain draft and order of which we should have possessed ourselves before. Will Monsieur Dufroy be wise enough to hand the envelope to me?"

"No, I will not."

"Is it still in your letter case?"

"No, it is not."

"Is it, then, in the keeping of monsieur's American friend?"

"No."

The big rascal's teeth flickered between his beard.

"But this is childish," he averred, in a considerably changed tone. "We will not be toyed with, and that is certain. Come, at once; where is the *paquet*? Tell me—be quick!"

Receiving no answer, the man spoke swiftly to his associates. Leaving their charge, they crossed quickly, and took positions on either side of Stafford.

Approaching the girl, the leader caught up her wrists behind, and fiercely addressed Dufroy.

"For the sake of mademoiselle, you shall tell us; for her sake—see?"

Stafford, from the other side, saw the girl wince—the tormentor was twisting her wrists. The young man plunged forward instantly, but the grips of the other two were about him at once—crushing him back.

"The draft—where is it?" he heard demanded, and close upon that an agonized sob from the girl.

Stafford, crammed back to the bookcase, twisted toward Dufroy.

"Tell them!" he cried; "d'you hear—tell them!"

But Dufroy, bunched upon the chair, seemed utterly unable to speak. His clouded, unmoving eyes were fixed upon the writhing girl.

Again the big rogue made his demand, and this time the girl screamed.



Stafford, at that moment, was visited with the strength of five.

With a great heave, he freed an arm, struck around with his right, and tore himself free. With the same movement, he was across the room, and his fist crashed into the midst of the tall man's scowl. The rascal swore glibly, but he released his victim to avoid a second potion.

Diverting his arm swiftly, Stafford swung it out, and caught the half-faint-girl.

"You fiend!" he cried thickly, beside himself with anger; "you cowardly fiend! There is the object you ask for, beneath the corner of that carpet—there, there! Go and take it, you ar-rant cur!"

The other pair had already booted the floor covering loose, and the revealed envelope was snatched up. There was a hasty conference, resulting in the production of a length of thin, wiry cord from one of the subordinate's pockets.

The trio then bore down upon Stafford in full strength, forcibly binding his wrists behind him. Searching him, they then deprived him of his penknife and his keys, fitting one of the latter to the outside of the study door.

Stafford, watching the last operation, turned to find that the girl's arms had also been secured, while Dufroy was bound hand and foot.

"Now," said the chief to Stafford, and the latter was conscious that all revolvers were out, "we have no wish to spill blood, so we will convey you and mademoiselle to a place of special safety. But behave. One syllable or one obstinate sign from either, and ——" He tapped his weapon significantly. "Now, Pierre," he continued, "take the lady's arm and lead her forward. You, monsieur, being of a fighting *genre*, shall receive the compliment of a double escort. Do as I bid, and every one shall be preserved—including Monsieur Dufroy."

The speaker walked to the cabinet, and took up the reading lamp which rested upon the top of it. Stafford was then ushered into the corridor, and the

door was locked upon the helpless Dufroy.

"Now, Joseph, pray lead. You, friend, will follow. I will come behind with the lamp—and my revolver!"

## CHAPTER V.

### A STRANGE PRISON.

Out in the hall, Stafford looked eagerly about for the girl, but though she had preceded him, with the third man, only a few seconds, neither she nor her guard were to be seen.

Where had they taken her, he wondered, and would they, as the chief villain had hinted, take him to the same place? Vaguely he hoped so.

But to his surprise, instead of conducting him downward toward the outside door, the man with the lamp turned and began to ascend the stairs to the next floor.

Nor did he pause there, but continued on to the fourth floor, which was the attic. From there a narrow, ladderlike flight of steps led upward to a flat-roofed observatory, which Stafford's uncle, an amateur astronomer, had caused to be built for the accommodation of his telescope, and when the leader started up this, Stafford believed he had discovered where his prison was to be.

But to his amazement, the man showed no intention of stopping; instead he approached an almost upright iron ladder, and, putting down the lamp, began calmly ascending toward the roof, assisted by the Frenchman with the gun, Stafford, with some little difficulty, on account of his bound hands, followed.

The trapdoor, he noticed, was open, and his heart leaped, for it seemed to indicate that the girl and her guard had preceded them.

But what, in the name of all that was mysterious, could they do on the roof, unless, perchance—he shuddered at the thought—they were to be thrown off; but though from what he had seen, he judged the villains were quite capable of such fiendishness, it seemed an utterly useless, reasonless thing to do.

It was a pitch-dark night, moonless and cloudy, and for a moment after Stafford emerged onto the roof, he could see nothing; then vaguely, wondering, he made out a huge, dark, shapeless mass that bulked black against the clouds above him, swaying gently in the light breeze.

Then as a small pocket electric bull's-eye in the hands of one of the men sent a thin shaft of light playing over and around the object, he saw that it was a balloon.

Stafford was not in the least fluttered. At this stage of the adventure he was serenely prepared for anything. The balloon, which was one of moderate size, seemed to be fastened to the house in some peculiar manner; on one side a rope ran downward into the darkness, and Stafford judged that somewhere below its trailing anchor was caught in the eaves of the house; on the other side another rope was secured to the stout railing surrounding the roof of the observatory, holding the basket within three feet of the roof.

Beside the car stood the third man, and at his feet sat the figure of the girl. Stafford wondered then why she sat, until he saw that her feet were tied.

"Now, Joseph," said the chief, "help to put mademoiselle in."

Joseph stooped to obey, and the girl was lifted into the car. This done, they approached Stafford. Not a word was spoken, but a sign was probably given.

Stafford, at all events, was suddenly jerked off his feet, those same feet snapped together with surprising crispness, and, before he knew it, his ankles were securely lashed together.

"I think monsieur will show no more fight now," remarked the big man, and he put away his revolver with a smooth chuckle.

They hoisted him together, all three, and got him betwixt the suspending hemp. This done, they started to cut away the dependent sand bags.

"Now, Pierre, you will see to the connection; fasten it."

One of them clambered in over Stafford's limbs. The cord of the escape

cock he wound about the mouth of the envelope, tying it firmly. He then cut off the loose end—and sprang out again.

"There is enough gas, Pierre—you are certain?"

"Quite. It was only filled yesterday. Without the weights, it will go—far enough."

"Then—away!"

Stafford's mind was a storm of conflicting thoughts. He chafed beneath his own impotence to act, and he fought, at the same time, against even verbal protest.

The fate in store for the girl and himself seemed horrible enough to contemplate, but words might only goad these knaves to even readier shifts.

So Stafford leashed his tongue; then simultaneously knives fell on both the tethering ropes, and, swaying gently, the big bag shot upward.

To those in the car the sensation was a queer one. The stable earth had dropped like a plummet, and now a breeze came whipping up from the remoteness of nowhere. They were gathered about by it, the lifting motion was largely deflected, and instead they were borne along. With the void of night below and above, these two were adrift on the wind.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE PRICELESS SIX.

Stafford broke the great silence strangely. He laughed. The sound of it startled the girl.

"How can you?" she protested.

"I can't help it," he told her. "I've wandered to-night beyond the ordinary bounds of things, and only a laugh will fit in. If you think it was a heartless laugh, you're wrong."

"I don't think it was a heartless laugh."

"Thanks. My name is Richard—otherwise Dick—Stafford. Yours, I believe, is Miss Craig. Now that we know each other, let me ask you a question. Do the cords—hurt?"

"Not if I keep quite still."

"Then, keep still; leave the strag-

gling to me. Now, are you comfortable enough to talk?"

"Of course."

"Then, if you can, in the smallest degree, enlighten me as to the meaning of all that has passed, I shall be truly grateful. For my part, I am of the opinion that it is really a quaint dream."

"I wish it were, but I am afraid it isn't. Dream or not, you shall hear it from its beginning. That man you found in your house is my brother-in-law; his name is Dufroy. He is the junior member of the firm of Dufroys, the Paris jewel house."

"The biggest jewel commissioners in the world," quoted Stafford. "Yes. I have heard of them."

"And you've also heard, I've no doubt, of a certain European province which has recently been raised to the status of a kingdom?"

Stafford mentioned the name of a dependency whose affairs had lately been in the press.

"That is right," said the girl. "You know, it has been a kingdom before, centuries ago, and on one of its then few articles of regalia appeared seven especially fine pearls, remarkable for their rare size and purity."

"Indeed! I had not heard of those."

"The Paris papers would have told you. Throughout the years, six of these pearls have remained together, changing hands occasionally, but never being quite lost sight of. Last year, in privileged circumstances, they were secured by an American establishment—Loming's, of New York. The price was two hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

"For six pearls!"

"For the six surviving pearls. To the kingdom they are priceless—the 'Priceless Six' they have been called. The new regalia of the kingdom is now in formation, and Dufroys are commissioned. Now, as you may understand, it is wished above all things to recall those six gems to their former use. Four weeks since, Louis—my sister's husband—waited on Loming's in New York, to examine the pearls and to discuss terms. He returned to Paris with

a favorable report. To-morrow morning—or, rather, *this* morning at ten o'clock, he is advised to appear at Loming's again, to purchase the historic stones. A draft was made out by Dufroy's——"

"And that is the draft these rascals are after?"

"Yes, as a means, of course, to the pearls. One of them will probably impersonate Louis, and present the order at ten o'clock."

"But what—how will they dispose of the things, even if they get them?"

"Louis supposes they will hold them for ransom."

"Whew! But please go on."

"I should like first to know how this balloon is going on. I think, as you are lying, you can just see over the wicker."

"Yes; I've been keeping a sort of lookout. The New York lights, away to the south, have been in view, but we are losing them now. From their position I have tried to judge our course. I should imagine we are bearing almost due east, perhaps a little south."

Evidently the girl did not realize the significance of the simple statement, for she merely nodded, and continued her story.

"I live with my father, whose country place is only a few miles north of yours—near Kensico—and when Louis is in America he makes his headquarters with us. He arrived late yesterday, and as my father was out of town on business, I took my car—I drive myself—and ran in to town to meet the steamer."

"She should have docked by four o'clock, which would have given us ample time to get home for dinner, but for some reason she was delayed, so it was after six when Louis finally walked down the gangplank. Then we decided to go to a hotel for dinner, so that it was nearly eleven when we passed through White Plains."

"As you know, there is a large field just beyond your place, a sort of ball and fair grounds, where for several days the small local fair has been in



progress, among the other attractions being a captive balloon.

"We had just reached this dark and lonely spot, and I was pointing out to Louis—who, like most Frenchmen, is interested in *aéronautics*—the dark bulk of the bag, drawn down to the ground and secured for the night, when suddenly five armed men sprang from the side of the road and surrounded the car."

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE COURAGE OF DUFROY.

Cicely paused, and for a moment the remembrance of her terrifying experience held her speechless; then, with a brave effort, she collected herself.

"I was horribly scared," she went on, "but they made us get out, and, while one guarded me and another held a knife at Louis' throat, the other three moved aside and whispered together.

"I could only catch an occasional sentence, but it was evident they were discussing us.

"Send him with her, I say," said one.

"Yes," growled another, "and have them drop down in time to queer the whole deal."

"The first speaker laughed horribly.

"With the wind this way?" he asked. "When they come down they——" But the third man, evidently the leader, interrupted.

"*Peste!*" he cried. "We waste time! You will need *him* for a model. Bring the girl."

"Two of them seized me, and before I knew what they were going to do they had hurried me across the road, into the field, and had tossed me into the basket of the balloon. Then they began hacking at the ropes that held it.

"But Louis is no coward, and, when he saw what was happening, he suddenly jerked away from his captor, and with a kick on the chin stretched him senseless. Then he seized the man's knife, and, dashing toward the balloon, sprang into the basket just as the last restraining rope was severed.

"It was all so sudden that the villains were taken completely by surprise,

but one of them managed to seize the edge of the basket as it rose, and slash at Louis with a knife, wounding him in the arm.

"Then we tore free and rose, but sluggishly, for the basket was heavily weighted with sand bags, but in a few seconds we were above the treetops. For some minutes we sat quite still, expecting every minute the men would shoot at us, but apparently they did not dare risk attracting attention.

"When we finally ventured to look over the edge of the basket, we saw we were drifting slowly, directly toward your house.

"Louis saw the danger at once, and called to me—his right arm being useless—to throw out ballast, and I, seizing the first thing my hand fell on, tossed over the anchor; it fell, but brought up with a jerk at the end of its rope, fifteen feet below, and then, before I could do more, *we* were brought up short as the anchor caught in the eaves of the house.

"Had Louis been himself, we could easily have disengaged it or cut the rope, but he was weak from loss of blood—half fainting in fact—and, as I thought we should be safe there, I assisted him down to the flat roof of the observatory scarcely five feet below us. Searching at once, we discovered a double trapdoor, part of which was not fastened. Plainly the house was then untenanted. Louis, directly we entered the room where you found him, was obliged to sit down. As best I could, I bound up his shoulder, and he spoke for a few minutes.

"He believed the biggest of our enemies to be a man named De Vienney—a rather notorious person whom he has seen in the French courts. Pierre he did not know, but the third rascal was Joseph Legare, a clerk at Dufroy's. Also—though at present he is clean-shaven—his resemblance to Louis has often been remarked. Louis could say little more than that before—he fainted."

"Ah! And you went to get help?"

"No—I took the candle, and went to find water. I was in the kitchen right

at the back when you stole quietly through the house. I felt only capable of waiting for whatever should happen next. What happened next—you know."

"The great thing for them, of course," he said at last, "is to prevent all chance of suspicion being aroused until after the hour of the appointment with Loming's. By George, when you think of it in that way, the balloon idea was not a bad one, after all! My appearance in this drama was not unnaturally an annoyance to them, and you were an incumbrance, too, which accounts for their packing us off—Whew! I must really give them a rest!"

"A rest?"

"Yes—my wrists. I've been contorting them ever since our excursion left. I really think I've stretched the fiber a trifle, but the knots are as viselike as ever."

"I wonder what time it is?"

"Jocund day, I fancy, should be on tiptoe presently."

"Have you any idea where we are?"

"Not in the least—I can spot no sort of landmark. But we are still bowling on at a round pace. We ought, with luck, to reach England in the course of the morning, or, possibly, France!"

"I envy you your jocular spirits. I wonder what they have done to poor Louis? D'you think they—they will spare him?"

"I should say so—now that he is no longer dangerous. The fact that they did not send him in with us rather clinches the impersonation idea. Beyond doubt, it is part of their admirable scheme to make up directly from the model—Hullo! What was that?"

"What was what?"

"An object in the bottom of the car here—my heel struck it as I stirred. It might be an empty tin—or perhaps a small lantern. By George! It *is* a lantern."

Stafford was all alertness in an instant.

"Miss Craig," he said, "if we can get out the lamp—and light it—we're saved!"

"Saved!" echoed the girl; but Staf-

ford's whole spirit was absorbed. Wriggling around, he fumbled behind for the lantern with his manacled members.

He grasped it at last, found the catch, opened it, and pulled out the oil well. Squirming then, he got his fingers—both hands—into his coat pocket, bringing forth matches.

"Now, then," he said, "look behind, and direct me. I am going somehow to strike a match. Try, in words, to guide me to the wick."

It was a trying, awkward process, but the little lamp was alight at last.

Then she saw his idea. He was going to *burn through the cords!*

## CHAPTER VIII.

### MORNING.

Cicely knew, although the man did not flinch, that he was undergoing a scorching trial, for the space between his palms was scarcely an inch. In the end, however—after twice relighting the lamp—his hands parted company.

Then they laughed together.

"We shall be down in time for breakfast, after all!" he declared. "The dawn! D'you see it?—the dawn! Your hands next, if you please—why, how numbed they are! If that brute who tied them like this were here, I—I'd kill him!"

With which heroic vehemence, he wrestled sturdily until he had vanquished the knots. Directly this was done, she clasped her hands in front of her.

"Thank you," she said; "that's quite a nice relief."

"They are crushed and aching; they must be," he averred, taking them gently in his own. Then, as he seemed disposed to keep them there, the lady ventured a suggestion.

"There are still the ankle cords," she said.

Stafford returned to the onslaught, bringing it to a successful issue.

"Hooray!" he cried, and they both hurried to spy out the world beneath.

What they saw might well have come as a shock after all that they had gone

through. "The sea!" gasped the girl—and the sea it certainly was, or the Sound rather, which, from their point of view, was about as bad.

Beneath them—and not very far beneath, either—was the gray, foam-flecked water. The girl sank upon her knees with a shudder, and covered her face in her hands. This night she had been sorely tried.

Stafford's touch was laid quietly on her shoulder.

"Come, we are not lost yet," he assured her; "be brave a little longer. See! What is that ahead? It is an island! We have lately sailed across the southern corner of Connecticut. Come, there is hope ahead. See, I will liberate the valve cord, and when we reach the island——"

"We shan't reach it." She spoke in a hopeless monotone. "We shall pass just away on the right."

And this, as he could see for himself, was undeniably true. He observed something else as well—the envelope above them was pinched and flabby, and their altitude was rapidly diminishing. Evidently captive balloons were not intended for long flights, and probably the quality of neither the envelope nor the gas was of the best, but there had remained sufficient to carry just these two and the car—minus the sand bags. But now, as far as he could judge, they seemed to be declining with the wind.

"Can you swim?" he asked swiftly.

She shook her head. Then she lifted her eyes.

"It must be leaking!" she cried; "we are falling into the sea!"

"But we are almost level with the island. Listen," he added earnestly; "at the last moment I shall take you in my arms, and jump with you into the water. If you will help me by keeping still, I think I can carry you to safety."

"You could never do it—oh, indeed, it is too hopeless!" She tried to draw away from him. "You must go alone—you must! Why——"

He had removed his shoes, and now he flung off his coat. Stooping resolutely, he slid his arms about her.

"This is the moment," he said. "Come!"

She looked up again, and their glances, for one infinite moment, rested upon each other. Then she released her hold on the ropes, and made no more opposition. He stood with her in his arms—and as he did so the great wicker basket jarred through a swelling wave. He stepped up then, and sprang with the same movement.

That swim was the last tremendous incident in what Stafford always called his "one crowded night." Cicely, a hundred yards from the shore, lost consciousness.

Stafford's fight for that hundred yards was a Herculean wrestle with death. It was when he aroused, to find himself prone upon the rough stones, that he knew that he had won.

He turned eagerly to the girl beside him, lifted her head upon his knee, and chafed her hands. At the moment that she opened her eyes, the sun burst out—warming the sea, the island, and the distant coast with a flood of morning glory.

"The night is over!" he cried to the girl.

A sharp scramble around the shingle and up the cliff set their bodies glowing despite their soaking garments. They assailed a cottage, to find the family just gathering for breakfast. There was a kindly bustling at once. The good lady of the house bore off Miss Craig while Stafford bearded his host.

"You have a sailing boat?" he asked sharply.

"Sure."

"Could you get me to the Connecticut shore so that I can dispatch a telegram by—nine o'clock?"

"Waal, I guess I could, mister—if I thought it was worth while. There ain't much air stirrin', though."

"Well, I want you to do your utmost. It is a matter which involves the sum of two or three fortunes. I promise you a hundred dollars if that wire reaches New York in time."

"A hundred! Gosh! Come ahead, mister, I'll get you there, if I rip the goldarned stick out of her."



## CHAPTER IX.

MR. LOMING.

Instead of pursuing their original intention, and bearing him to New York in the captured motor, Monsieur Dufroy's captors had made the best of an altered situation by leaving him a prisoner, bound, at Cawthorne Park, in the lofty observation chamber, where dwelt the telescope.

Before parting from him, however, the promising Joseph, with an amazing feeling for detail, had achieved a carefully copied disguise, a disguise, moreover, which promised the essential quality of surviving a close inspection.

Punctually at nine-thirty, Mr. David Loming was in his office, and in the drawer of the table at which he sat was a compact case containing the six historic pearls.

At ten o'clock precisely, a smartly garbed personage presented a card at the outer office—which card proclaimed him to be Monsieur Louis Dufroy—and was ushered into Mr. Loming's room.

He was accompanied by another man, of distinguished and very foreign appearance.

"Monsieur Loming," said Monsieur "Dufroy," after he had shaken hands with the jeweler, "permit me to present his grace—eh. I should say"—he coughed apologetically behind his hand—"Monsieur De Vienney. Monsieur De Vienney is the representative in this country of his highness—eh—that is—our client, and it seemed to me wise that he should be present at the consummation of our little—as you say—deal."

Mr. Loming bowed, and his keen eyes took in every detail of the dress and expression of his visitors. He had seen Dufroy but twice: once in Paris and more recently when that gentleman had called upon him a month before in relation to the pearls, but he had a remarkable memory for faces; a fact which had stood him in good stead more than once in his business life.

"I am charmed to meet Monsieur De Vienney," he said quietly. "If you will be seated, gentlemen, we will proceed to business. I presume," he added

when they had taken the chairs he indicated, "that you have the necessary papers and—credentials."

"Certainly, monsieur," replied "Dufroy," looking slightly surprised at the obvious stress laid upon the last word. "I have the draft for the amount as agreed; also the necessary receipts and other papers."

"Ah! Quite so!" returned Mr. Loming blandly. "And I suppose of course there will be no trouble about identification, Monsieur Dufroy?"

"Dufroy" started, and his face paled a little; then he drew himself up haughtily.

"Really!" he said, with an amazement that was by no means feigned. "I—I am at a loss to understand you, monsieur. Who could identify me more surely than yourself?"

"Ah! Quite so!" repeated Mr. Loming, smiling. "But you see, my dear Monsieur Dufroy, in an affair of this magnitude, one must be very sure; one must not even trust the unsupported evidence of one's own eyes. Especially," he added, his voice suddenly becoming hard, "when there is the shadow of a *doubt*."

At the word all three sprang to their feet; "Dufroy" and De Vienney, in excitement; Mr. Loming, with a cool smile.

"Doubt!" cried "Dufroy" angrily. "What do you mean, monsieur? Who has dared——"

With a quick movement, Mr. Loming placed on his desk before them a telegraph slip. Together the two miscreants read it.

Louis Dufroy kidnaped. Impersonation feared. Do not part with pearls. Detain any one presenting draft in spite of all credentials or appearances. Will follow, first train.

RICHARD STAFFORD.

For a moment the two leaned over the message, and "Dufroy's" hand trembled as it rested upon the desk, but De Vienney was made of sterner stuff.

"This is an outrage," he cried vehemently. "Is it possible, monsieur, that you place any faith in this ridiculous telegram? It is an insult, monsieur, for which you shall answer to me. I insist

on an instant apology. I insist that my friend's credentials be honored at once and your agreement fulfilled. I insist——"

The door opened, and the entrance of a clerk interrupted him; but, after a moment's whispered conference with Loming, the clerk departed, and De Vienney returned to the attack.

"Do you know who I am, monsieur?" he asked fiercely. "I am—bah! I will not dishonor a noble name by speaking it in your presence; but my friend—him you know. I say *you* know that he is——"

"Joseph Legare, Monsieur Dufroy's treacherous clerk," supplied a calm voice from the doorway, and, whirling, the two conspirators faced Dick Stafford; and, clinging to his arm, pale but composed, was Cicely Craig.

For a moment the two thieves stood, staring; then, seeing that the game was up, De Vienney, with a snarling imprecation, sprang toward the door, reaching to his hip pocket as he did so.

But before he could draw his weapon, four officers, one in uniform and three plain-clothes men, appeared as by magic from an adjoining room, and in less time than it takes to tell it the two were disarmed and handcuffed.

"And Monsieur Dufroy?" asked Monsieur Loming anxiously when the officers had departed with their prisoners and good descriptions of the three minor rogues.

"He is all right, I am glad to say," replied Stafford; "I wired the White

Plains police at the same time I wired you this morning, and on arriving in town I learned by telephone that he had been found in my house. He is now in the hospital, but his wound is slight, and he will be out in a day or two."

"That is good news indeed," returned Mr. Loming heartily. "But, Mr. Stafford, we all certainly owe you a great deal. I very much fear that those clever rascals would have got away with the pearls but for you, for, had it not been for your wire, it would not have occurred to me to doubt the false Monsieur Dufroy. Certainly you should have *some* reward, though one cannot offer a man in your position any——"

Stafford laughed.

"Reward!" he replied gayly. "I'm going to take my own reward, Mr. Loming—that is, I hope to. You may not know it," he added, lowering his voice, and glancing slyly at Cicely, "but there were *seven* of those pearls. Six I saved for you, but the seventh and best I'm going to keep for myself—if I can."

Mr. Loming's eyes twinkled, and he stroked his chin gently as he glanced at the girl, who, though she could not hear, was gazing earnestly at Stafford.

"Ah! Quite so!" he said dryly. "Well, in that case you do not need a reward, young man. Eh? In fact I think perhaps it's the other way about."

"If—if the purchase of a three-carat solitaire would square it——" began Stafford, with a grin.

And Mr. Loming laughed.

### Closing the Incident

I NEVER heard of but one perfect boy," said Johnnie pensively, as he sat in the corner, doing penance.

"And who was that?" asked mamma.

"Papa—when he was little," was the answer.

And silence reigned for the space of five minutes.

### He Kept His Head

JOHNSON—"That man Williams never lost his head in a football game, did he?"

Thompson (reflectively)—"No, I think not. He's lost an ear, part of his nose, and some teeth; but I do not remember ever hearing of his losing his head."

# Between Two Evils

By Edwin Larkmore

Uncle Sam's soldiers are not the only ones who have to bear the brunt of the white man's burden in the Philippines. Here you have a thrilling story of the battle faced by the brave men and women who go to the Islands to set up American industries. A remarkable tale, big in its tragic significance.

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

## CHAPTER I.

### CUTTING THE CARDS.

INSIDE the barricaded rice factory were thirteen of us; eight men, four women, and a child. Outside there swarmed hundreds of "our little brown brothers," lusting after the lives of the men and women.

We had plenty of food and water. We could have defended the place for weeks, had it not been for our one great lack—that of ammunition. Only a few rounds remained for our rifles, while by common consent our only loaded six-shooter was held by the manager as a last desperate resort, should the Filipinos succeed in rushing the factory. Four of its chambers still held cartridges.

Upon the flat roof of the factory tower, over which hung motionless the most glorious flag in the world, Jack Winton and I squatted, keeping guard, while we confounded the glare and the heat and, above all, the criminal folly of the cheeseparer company which kept its officers on dangerous stations short of ammunition.

On three sides of the factory lay a clearing, perhaps two hundred yards wide. Beyond this stood the impenetrable wall of the Philippine jungle. On the fourth crawled the sluggish, mud-colored River Agno, which was practically our sole means of communication with the world beyond.

The rank, green foliage of the jungle, crowned with feathery palms, lay silent and motionless in the glare of sunlight. Afar off a thin, quavering

voice was singing a never-ending song. Ever and again a harsh, discordant chorus took up the weird refrain, to cease suddenly, and leave the melancholy plaint floating on the still air.

It was the natives carousing over some gréat, earthen *tenajas*, containing *vino de nipa*, the villainous liquor of the islands, which they had looted from the gadong—colloquially "godown"—of a near-by Chinese merchant.

Harding, the manager of the factory, and therefore the leader of our small garrison, came briskly up the spiral iron staircase that gave access to the tower; a tall, powerful man, whose will was as strong as his body—which is saying much.

He looked upon the sweeping semicircle of jungle, in whose breathless depths lurked death, upon the sluggish river, listened for a moment to the plaintive singsong and harsh chorus; then squatted down with an air of desperate resolve.

"Look here, boys," he began, "we've been talking things over below, and have decided that we are about at the end of our tether. The next time those drunken brutes try to rush the place, we can hold 'em at bay until we've fired our last shot—but then they'll swamp us by sheer weight of numbers. You know what it means for us men."

We nodded, but did not speak.

"But for the women," he went on, "there'll be left only that of which we don't care to think. Of course, unless I'm killed before they force an entrance, they won't get the women alive."

Again we silently acquiesced.



"Now, our only chance of escape, as you know, is by sending thirty miles down to our next factory. If one of us could get through the gugas, he could be back on a *banca*, with a lot more of those beastly dugouts, all of them filled with men, within twenty-four hours."

"If," agreed Jack.

"Exactly. The chances are—but you know that as well as I. But we must make some attempt. The question is—who shall make it? Now, we are all married men, with dependent wives and families, save you two fellows."

I had thought that all over, and already had made up my mind to volunteer that same evening. I told him so.

"But not until I've failed!" called Jack sharply. "I resolved to make the try last night."

"So far as I know, I haven't a relative in the world," I said.

"Neither have I."

"Yes; but there's Adela."

He was silent.

"Look here, boys; there's no need for you two to argue which is most fitted to go. You two are the only single men of the party, and that's enough to qualify you both. Suppose you cut to decide which tries to run the gantlet." As he spoke, he held toward us an old, worn pack of cards.

I looked at Jack Winton, and he looked at me. It seemed almost irreverent to risk one's life on the turn of a colored bit of pasteboard, but at any rate it would be an easy and an absolutely fair means of deciding which of us was to make the suicidal attempt.

"It goes," said I. Jack nodded again.

Harding shuffled the cards. It seemed to Winton and me that he took a very long time about it. But at last he set the deck on the hot roof before us.

"The elder to cut first and the highest card to go," he said.

I cut and turned up my card. It was the deuce of hearts. I could not have cut lower.

Harding silently shuffled the pack, and placed it before Winton. He carelessly raised a few cards, and flipped

them, faces upward, on the roof. A figure in motley, with cap and bells, lay exposed.

It was the joker!

## CHAPTER II.

### THE ACE OF SPADES.

With an angry exclamation, Winton threw the joker over the side of the tower, and we all three burst into uproarious laughter. Our nerves were horribly overstrained by the ordeal of the past few weeks, and there was something very like hysteria in our sudden mirth. Still, for the moment our foes were forgotten.

Then something came whining up from the steaming, green jungle, a splinter of wood flew from the flagstaff against which Harding was leaning, six inches above the manager's head, and an instant later we heard the distant report of a rifle.

All three of us threw ourselves flat on the roof.

"Are you hit?" I inquired anxiously of Harding.

"No, thank Heaven! It's that damned half-breed who's sniping at us. A gugu proper can't hit a haystack at a yard when he's sober, far less when he's not. But this chap can shoot. Armitage, you were on the American team at Bisley. See if you can wing the beggar. I'm more afraid of him than of all the rest put together. He's the leader of those *ladrónes*. If you can plug him, the whole uprising will fizzle out. See! There's his white helmet moving—there—under that tall palm."

Resting my rifle on the improvised breastwork of earth-filled packing cases, I waited until the tiny, white dot remained still for a moment; then sighted carefully and fired.

The white helmet vanished. A fan-shaped palm frond fell from its parent stem and fluttered down.

"Another cartridge gone—and absolutely wasted!" I groaned.

"Let's return to our card cutting," suggested Winton flippantly. "We

haven't found out yet which of us is to go."

Harding, collecting the scattered cards, shuffled them again, while I, disgusted by my bad shot, turned my back and pretended to be watching for invisible foes in the jungle, until, hearing my name called, I turned, to find that the cards were ready.

I cut, and turned up the queen of hearts.

"Ha! The worst female in the pack! She never brought any man luck!" cried Winton boisterously. "I shan't beat that, I know!"

Hardly waiting for the deck to be reshuffled, he put forth his hand and turned up a card.

It was the ace of spades!

All through the Philippines this card is the one, of all the fifty-two, which is most notoriously, in the gambler's superstition, the forerunner of misfortune. All three of us, I think, were a little affected by this absurd belief just then.

Still, Heaven knows that no ominous card was necessary to cause the silence, broken only by the wailing song and its harsh chorus, which followed. We all realized fully that Jack was about to set out on a journey which would end in his death or our deliverance. I figured the odds, as coolly as I could, as something like twenty to one against the latter ending.

"A single spade to dig my grave," he quoted, with a pathetic effort at indifference. "Well—that's the answer."

"Nonsense!" said Harding, with forced cheerfulness. "You'll be back here by to-morrow at this time with reinforcements. And after we've ripped those beastly gugas up the back, we'll *sacar* that infernal mestizo and send him to the other world—preferably the portion where the climate most resembles this—by cable."

"Surest thing you know," assented poor Jack, trying—and failing—to speak with conviction.

"No doubt, however," Harding went on, "you'd like to—er—you—perhaps you have some arrangements to make

before you start. I'll stand the rest of your watch. Go on down."

Without a word, Winton turned and went down the stairs.

"Heaven alone knows what the end of this will be," Harding went on. "But may it have mercy upon that poor fellow, if he falls into the hands of those unutterable beasts. You remember the half-breed, Aurelio Sisóng? No? Well, he was before your time here. He was employed in the factory until he made himself a nuisance to my daughter Adela. In fact, he fell in love with and tried to force his attentions upon her. Of course, I kicked him out, and he went back to his jungle relatives—his father was a *Chino*—swearing revenge. It's he, of course, who's at the bottom of this outbreak."

When I passed the door of Winton's room, half an hour later, when my watch was ended, I caught the sound of a woman sobbing as though her heart would break. I knew who it was. And I knew—even then with a pang of envy—what the sobs meant to the girl who tried so vainly to control them.

### CHAPTER III.

#### A SHARP REPORT.

Winton had gone.

Emerging from the little door at the foot of the tower, he had crept on hands and knees down to the river in order to make his way as far as he could under the shelter of nipa palms that fringed the bank, before crossing the bare clearing, that he must traverse before gaining the cover of the jungle.

All the adult members of our little garrison were on the roof of the tower, anxiously awaiting the outcome of our forlorn hope. For we knew that in an hour at the utmost he would be beyond the range of wandering members of Aurelio's gang, if he ever was to be, and the first terrible danger would be safely passed.

The glorious tropical moon advanced majestically across the heavens. Not a floating wisp of vapor dimmed the great stars, which, set in a sky of blue velvet, seem, in those latitudes, so much

nearer to the earth than they ever are elsewhere. Not a breath of wind frosted the muddy river, turned by the moonlight to polished silver.

It was oppressively quiet. Even the Filipinos were silent. And this last was a bad sign; it meant either that they had become sober or else were asleep, in which case they would awake sober, or nearly so.

Suddenly we saw Winton emerge from the fringe of palms, and, bent almost double in order to gain as much shelter as possible from the sloping bank, run with almost incredible swiftness across the bare, white gap of the clearing to gain the shadow of the jungle, into which he plunged and was gone.

Had he been seen by any of our enemies? Would he get safely away, now that he had passed the worst of the danger zone? Time alone would tell.

"That wretched mestizo is the only one of the beasts I fear," said Harding to me, and in an undertone, for Adela was standing near. "The others probably are all asleep, dead drunk; but he has the cunning of the devil—who was his father instead of that Chinaman, I sometimes think."

Scarcely had he finished when there came from the jungle a sharp report, almost instantly followed by two more in quick succession.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Harding loudly.

"Father! Father! Tell me—what is it!" asked Adela, in a voice that was no more than a husky whisper, as, catching her father by his shoulders, she looked into his eyes as though she would read her answer there. "It isn't Jack, is it? It *can't* be Jack. He's brave—he can shoot, and he's armed. He's beaten them off, that's all. Isn't it so, father? Tell me!"

"You'd better know now, my poor little girl," replied Harding with harsh kindness. "Those were pistol shots—and Winton had only a knife."

With a little cry, Adela turned to go, but swayed and would have fallen had her mother not caught her, pressing her close, with those little, inarticulate

sounds of comfort such as women use when their young is in distress.

Harding removed his pith helmet, an example that was followed by all the men, and for a minute or so we stood there, in the moonlight, without speaking. I don't know why we did it. It was a sort of Godspeed to poor Jack, I suppose.

## CHAPTER IV.

### A CRITICAL QUESTION.

As the burning, vertical rays of the sun beat down in merciless fury on the bare clearing around the factory, a small group of men emerged from the jungle, and, preceded by one carrying a rag of white at the end of a stick, advanced toward the building. As they came nearer, we saw the group consisted of about a dozen natives, who were apparently carrying or supporting something; but our whole attention was riveted on the man in front, for in the slight, rather graceful figure, clad in a ragged drill suit, and evil, saddle-colored face, capped with a curious white helmet, we recognized the leader of the rebels and author of all our troubles—the mestizo, Aurelio Sisóng.

All the men of our garrison were at their appointed posts, ready for any treachery, while the women were watching at a barricaded window below. On the flat roof of the tower stood the manager and I, alone.

The group halted about one hundred yards away, but Sisóng advanced, until Harding, raising himself above the breastwork of packing cases, commanded him to stand still.

The colloquy that ensued was brief and to the point.

"Now, then, you yellow scum, what do you want?" asked Harding roughly, looking down on the mestizo, who stood smoking a cigarette about twenty yards from the base of the tower. "I give you five minutes, and then clear off out of the range of my rifle; the air makes me feel sick when you are anywhere about."

"Ah! I will not be longer, or you might be tempted to waste another of



the few cartridges you have left," answered the *ladron* leader in excellent Spanish, and with a mock bow. "You are about at the end of your ammunition, I know, while we have a few thousand rounds, also the gunpowder which that *Chino* merchant so carefully hid in his godown. Therefore, I come to offer terms, which you will be wise to accept."

"Go on," said Harding gruffly.

"I offer to you, on one condition, a safe journey down river to your next factory. I promise you, on this condition being fulfilled, that you shall leave this place and pass unmolested to your destination."

"And your condition——"

"Is that you hand over to me your daughter Adela?"

"You lemon-colored devil!"

"I give you five minutes to decide. You may value the lives of those under you lightly, but your men may feel otherwise!"

"You scum of two races, clear off, or I will shoot you!"

"You refuse?"

"Go back to your tobacco-herd scum, you shame of your mother, and tell them I will shoot every woman with my own hand before they fall into your power alive!"

Suddenly the half-breed swung round, and shouted some words in the native tongue to the group of his men, who had been standing impassively during the above talk. As if in obedience to a preconcerted plan, they instantly opened out.

A loud groan of anguish broke from the throats of the men of our garrison, like the first deep gun of an ocean fight; and piercing it like a silver bugle came a glad cry in a woman's treble.

For in the center of the group, ghastly pale, his head covered with blood-stained bandages, and supported on either side by a boloman, was the figure of Jack Winton.

Running swiftly back to the little group, the *ladron* leader drew a revolver from his belt, and, discharging one chamber into the air to show it was loaded, placed the muzzle against the

head of the limp figure on which all our eyes were centered. Raising his voice, he snarled out a few sentences in the native tongue that sent Harding white beneath his sunburn, and forced an exclamation of agony from his clenched lips.

"He says unless I hand over Adela he will shoot Winton before our eyes! Heaven! What shall I do?"

It was a frightful situation. Beads of agony bedewed Harding's face, as he nerved himself to utter the words that would virtually send Winton to his death and brand him as his murderer. But a new and even more trying ordeal awaited him.

From the end of the factory, a small, slender figure in white suddenly emerged into the hot sunlight, and ran swiftly and lightly over the burning ground toward the grim group.

It was Adela, running to shield the man she loved.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE TARGET CHOSEN.

"Adela! Stop! For Heaven's sake, come back! You are mad!" shouted Harding in a desperate attempt to turn her from her purpose.

She did not hesitate or falter for one instant, but ran steadily on toward the limp figure in the center of the group. As she approached her lover, the mestizo seemed by an effort to rouse himself from the state of amazement into which all had been thrown by this bold move, and running forward endeavored to restrain her from reaching him. By a sudden swerve she avoided him, and, springing to Winton, flung her arms around his neck.

Instantly she recoiled with a terrible cry:

"He is dead! They have killed him!"

Indeed, it was but the dead body of our poor friend that the Filipinos supported, and, releasing their hold, it fell prone to the ground.

Adela had sunk to her knees beside her dead fiancé, her face buried in her hands; behind her was the half-breed,

and standing around in a semicircle were the stolid natives.

With loathsome words of endearment, the half-breed approached Adela. He infolded her in his arms; he would have borne her away. Like some netted bird in the hands of the fowler, she struggled, she strove to free herself from his embrace. In her desperate efforts, her brown hair became unfastened and fell about her shoulders.

Aurelio called upon his companions to assist, and they crowded around the struggling pair. By a frightful effort, Adela freed her right arm, and, whipping from out of her *chatelaine* a pair of scissors, she struck out with savage vehemence at anything within reach.

Instantly her white dress was stained and smeared by sudden spurts of crimson, and, infuriated by the wounds, the natives flung themselves upon her savagely, and her slender form was lost to sight in a chaos of tossing arms and heads. At length she was overcome, and, held by two of the little brown men, she stood half fainting, her head falling back with terror and exhaustion.

The mestizo had relapsed into his mother tongue, and with oaths shouted blistering threats, such as their Malay idiom coins so easily, and which, for the time, actually seemed to take the reason from our men, so that they raged aimlessly up and down the barricaded balcony.

Harding was the only one who kept his head, and it was his voice, cold and hard as steel, that recalled me to myself:

"Armitage, you're our best shot."

"Yes."

"You're the only man who can save Adela." There was a catch in his voice here, but it went bravely on, notwithstanding: "You must do your duty, Armitage."

"How?" I stammered, though I knew, and the knowledge turned me sick. I had not the courage to face it.

"Put a bullet through her, man! And do it now—quick! Can't you see they're carrying her off?"

8B

"I—I—well, I can't, Harding; that's the fact. I can't!"

"Man, you must! Won't you save my girl from a living hell? You must! Take that rifle, you coward—and aim it straight!"

I raised the rifle as he told me. As I did so, there came a blackness before my eyes. But that cleared away, and my hand grew steady as I leveled it.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A DECISIVE BULLET.

Depending from Adela's neck by a slender gold chain was a heart-shaped locket containing the portrait of the man who lay stark and silent at her feet; and upon this locket, twisted aside by her desperate struggle, was my rifle sighted.

The locket rested on her left breast, just above her heart; it rose and fell with her panting, and the rays of the sun falling upon it were heliographed to me in a message of agony and despair as I lay looking along the sights of my rifle.

It wanted but a pressure of my finger on the trigger to calm her tortured and distracted mind, and to release her forever from the cruel hands that held her so brutally; and yet I hesitated. I wavered; I would have refused to fire, when I suddenly saw over her bare shoulder the gloating face of the mestizo.

"Heaven forgive me!" I mentally exclaimed, and was about to press the trigger, when—in a flash I shifted my aim.

There was a spurt of flame, a sharp report, and a little puff of smoke.

With a choking, liquid cry, the half-breed lurched sideways, and, twisting round, fell flat upon his face—dead!

My new aim was true. I had shot the *ladrón* chief.

Then what no one expected happened. At the sudden fall of their leader, struck down at a distance they counted as secure from rifle fire, his brown followers wavered, turned tail, and ran for shelter in the jungle. One

more daring than the rest snatched up in his arms the slight figure of the girl, and bore her off as his special prize.

At this sight, a frightful cry of rage broke from the men of our garrison. All order and authority were forgotten, and, hastily unbarricading a ground-floor window, they swarmed out in a mad attempt to rescue the girl.

Forgotten was the unguarded factory, unheeded the swarm of enemies; to overtake that little brown man and tear from his arms that precious burden under which he staggered before he reached the jungle, was the sole thought in all our minds. Over the parched clearing we raced—on, on.

Suddenly from the direction of the *ladrón* camp came a sharp report, followed instantly by a frightful explosion that I can liken only to a terrific bellow of thunder.

The earth shook beneath us, a vast cloud of dense gray smoke jetted up into the air, and slowly drifted across the sun, obscuring its vivid rays; and falling all around us came a shower of earth, stones, branches of trees, fragments of wood, scraps of iron, and soft,

spongy masses that left an ominous dark stain where they fell.

Across the silence that followed this explosion came the stentorian voice of Harding upon my tingling and deafened ears:

"Thank Heaven! The gugs have fired the gunpowder!"

Terrified by the explosion, the man who was bearing off Adela dropped her to the ground, and, continuing his headlong flight, disappeared with his companions into the depths of the jungle.

A moment later the unconscious form of Adela was resting safely in her father's arms.

Deprived of their leader, and panic-stricken by the explosion which destroyed half their number, the *ladrónes* fled from their camp, and sought safety in the depths of the pathless jungle. The whole rebellion fizzled out like a broken firecracker.

Two days later a fleet of canoes came up river from our next trading station, bringing the greatly needed ammunition. They bore away the women and Adela, for Harding resolved that they should never be exposed to such danger again.

## No Surrender

By Andrew Henry Lowe

A pretty slick article picks an American merchant skipper for an "easy mark"

A NEW YORK yacht-touring company found recently that the accommodation on their own vessels could not cope with the applications for berths on the part of those who desired to spend a portion of the winter under more sunny skies than prevailed in the Northern States.

At that time there was lying at one of the New York docks a bark that had been on the passenger and finer cargo traffic between United States ports and the West Indies, but, like others of her class, had been ousted

from the trade through the advent of light-drafted steamers.

She was a splendidly built wooden vessel, possessing fine lines, fast sailing capacity, and excellent accommodation for a goodly number of first-class passengers.

She was of limited tonnage, and had quite a graceful, yachtlike appearance. In fact, her captain, who was part owner of her, had brought her to New York in the hope of disposing of her for yachting purposes.

But those who can afford such a lux-



ury do not care for cruising vessels of the sailing type, usually preferring steam.

And so she was lying idle, without a market; incurring charges, but earning not a penny—"eating her head off," as the seafaring class put it.

The yachting company heard of her, approved of her, chartered her, and fitting her out, sent her off, with a party of between forty and fifty, on a few weeks' voyaging among the Cape Verde and Canary Islands.

Now, as no vessel can go to sea without something of weight in her to ballast her, the captain of the *Juanita*, who was a shrewd man of business, decided to meet this necessity by that which might prove a profitable commercial enterprise.

He had learned that at the places where he meant to touch there was always a demand for high-class building material, such as fireproof and glazed bricks, tiles, marble mantelpieces, porcelain baths, stucco, Portland cement, etc., so he shipped several hundred tons of that class of goods, hoping to dispose of them at handsome profits; cheap sand or shingle could be loaded to take their place.

The first island called at was Madeira, which belongs to the Portuguese.

In order that the somewhat thrilling incidents that follow may be understood, it is necessary that I should briefly describe the customs regulations at Funchal, the chief port of the beautiful island where the adventure to the *Juanita* took place.

Steamers merely touching for coal do not require to supply to the officers who board them on their entrance, manifests of the cargo they are carrying.

They have to provide, however, a minute list of all stores, down to the smallest items, and are liable to be heavily fined should there prove to be a discrepancy—even to a few boxes of matches—in case of their being rummaged.

This rarely takes place, especially when liners are concerned; for if ships calling regularly for coaling were unduly harassed, they would simply give

Madeira the go by, and get their bunkers filled at Las Palmas, the former place thus losing the benefit of the dues and the traffic.

But it is very different with vessels having whole or part cargo for Funchal. They have to give not only store lists, but manifests of everything on board.

When discharging is finished, the customs people search the whole ship minutely, and woe to the master should any package of the freightage have been overlooked, or any article in the storeroom omitted from the list.

Maderia, even in what is called its winter season, is a balmy paradise of flowery and leafy luxuriance, and visitors to this lovely spot are never weary of watching the heavy, ozone-laden surf breaking against the rocks, or sweeping far up the shingly beach of the bay.

Nor do they soon tire of ascending the excellently causewayed roads on the slopes of the hills that terminate in a lofty snow-capped peak, or of admiring the mansions that dot the landscape with white, situated in the midst of the rich bloom of their large and beautiful gardens.

At the request of his passengers, to please whom was his chief aim and duty, the captain of the *Juanita* decided to give them a week at Madeira, for shore-going purposes, before proceeding to Teneriffe and Las Palmas.

The day following his arrival he found a merchant for a considerable portion of his building material; and, after concluding the bargain, the next morning he visited the customhouse, to learn what forms he had to make up, and what regulations to comply with before landing the goods.

To his astonishment and disgust, the collector, a young, inexperienced, but very zealous officer of the new republic, instantly put a damper upon the buoyancy he was feeling through his successful completion of what promised to be a profitable transaction.

"Ah, but, captain, you have made one little mistake, and will require to pay one fine of four thousand dollars."

"A fine of four thousand dollars!"

exclaimed the astonished skipper. "And why should I pay such a fine, will you kindly explain?"

"Because you did not say on entering that you had cargo for Madeira. You did not give in any manifest of it."

"But, as I've explained to you, I had no cargo, in point of fact, for Madeira. It was salable stuff I carried as ballast on the chance of getting customers for it. I've found one here, and as I don't want to break your laws in any way, I've come to ask you what regulations you want me to comply with."

"Regulations? Yes, very good, captain; you will require to comply with regulations if you wish to land anything here, but before that you must pay the fine of four thousand dollars."

"Death's-heads and rattlesnakes! You can't understand what I mean. You must be making a thundering mistake, Mr. Collector. Do you actually want me to pay *four thousand dollars*?"

"Yes, four thousand dollars."

"Do you mean gold dollars? Do you mean four thousand American dollars?"

"Yes, four thousand American dollars," and an unctuous smile passed over the sallow countenance of the collector.

"Why, such a sum would be extortionate, even supposing I had been caught in the act of smuggling the stuff ashore. That certainly *would* have been breaking a law; but the idea that you should wish to fine me for seeking to keep the law is the most absurd thing I've ever run across. Four thousand dollars; you can't be in earnest, Mr. Collector. My eyes! But it sounds as bad as piracy on the high seas."

"All the same, you will require to pay it," said the collector suavely. He had maintained an imperturbable urbanity throughout the interview, whereas the captain was fast losing his temper at the thought of what he afterward termed "the most tarnation, impudent, *un-whiskered* attempt to defraud" he had ever met with or heard of since first going to sea.

"I most emphatically won't pay it; not by a long chalk. No, siree! You don't find Silas B. Warner playing the

fool to the tune of four thousand dollars in return for nothing at all. I'll tell you what—I won't land the stuff. I'll take it away as I brought it in, losing the customer and the profit, thanks to your blamed, pig-headed regulations at this poking, guttering, one-mule hole of a place. Yes, that's it—I won't land the materials; and so there will be no need for any manifest or talk of a fine."

"Ah, but, captain, it is you who do not understand. Whether you land the cargo or do not land it, you must pay the fine all the same."

"*What!*" fairly yelled Captain Warner, purple with rage—"pay the fine all the same! I'll see you hanged first. I'll clear out of your blooming harbor, and pray that I may never drop anchor in it again."

The captain made a mistake in thus revealing his intention. Anger had overcome his judgment; and he had reason afterward to regret his hasty error of speech.

The collector again smiled. "Ah, you will leave us," he remarked quietly, "and so escape the fine? But a sailing ship, captain, cannot proceed without wind, and it is now quite calm. I shall send off an armed force to arrest your vessel if the fine is not paid in two hours. You will be wise to submit, captain. It is your company that will lose, and not you. *They* will pay the fine. All you have to do is to authorize your agents to settle with us."

It was the collector who had now given himself away. Like a flash, the situation revealed itself to Captain Warner.

The collector supposed that the vessel belonged to a rich American company; and, with the extravagant notions that many foreigners entertain as to the wealth and prodigality of important American firms, he imagined that he had only to levy a large enough sum—magnifying thus the appearance of the offense—to secure, at any rate, a fair portion of the penalty imposed.

Perhaps—thought the astute Yankee—some one had cabled or mailed out word that he *had* building materials on board and was likely to sell some of

them at Maderia, which was a common enough trick in the shipping world.

Thus the whole imposition might have been planned before the *Juanita* arrived in the roadstead. So thought Captain Warner, and it is probable that his inference was correct.

He had made no secret on shipping his cargo as to how he purposed trying to dispose of it. He was now in a perfect fury, and could hardly restrain himself from laying hands upon the cool and smiling functionary, and giving him a first-class thrashing.

"You'll arrest my ship, will you? You'll arrest my ship; we'll see about that," he cried, and, dashing out of the official presence, he hastened to the office of his agents.

The manager looked grave when he heard Captain Warner's story, but he passed no comment.

"I'm quite sure the stubborn block-head doesn't understand the affair. Can't you let me have a clerk that knows the lingo, to explain things to him?"

The manager conferred, apart, with a smart young Portuguese assistant who had a thorough command of English, and the latter accompanied the captain back to the customhouse.

He informed the collector that the *Juanita* did not belong to the yachting company; that she was only chartered for the present cruise; that the master was part owner of her, and was alone responsible for the cargo she had on board.

The knowledge of these details had its effect, for, after a great deal of talk and gesticulation, the collector said that he would reduce the fine to one thousand dollars, but would accept not a dollar less, and that if this demand were not met within two hours he would send off a party to arrest the ship.

"Come away," said the captain, on hearing this decision, "or, by thunder, I'll be forgetting myself;" and he and the clerk returned to the office, where, without revealing his exact intentions, he directed that his accounts be made up at once; and, after hurrying to the

market with an order for stores, he repaired to the beach.

At this spot there are always gathered a number of men and boys who pick up a livelihood by directing casual visitors to the curio shops and the various points of interest.

These guides are a quick-witted lot, and all of them are able to speak sufficient English to serve the occasion; in fact, the knowledge some of them possess of the language is quite wonderful.

Captain Warner was soon surrounded by a group of these natives, and picked out half a dozen of the most capable of them to scour off and find his passengers and bring them to the beach.

"Tell them I'm waiting for them here, to take them off to the ship at once," he ordered. "Say that it might be dangerous for them to delay."

To his chagrin, one of the crowd gave the information that a party of six of them had gone up a mountain road, with a guide, and purposed making a lengthy climb, which was confirmed by several of the others.

"Then off after them, two of you. Hire a couple of bullock sleighs and follow them at top speed. And see here"—he wrote a brief but imperative note—"give them that. Now, away with you like greased lightning, and if you bring them back within one hour, I'll make it worth your while."

It was at this juncture that I appeared on the scene. We had dropped anchor in the roadstead, half an hour previously, for coaling purposes, on our homeward run from the River Plate, and I had come ashore to stretch my limbs and order some fresh provisions.

I was in uniform, and, as my surfboat was carried high and dry near to the captain's group, he at once got his eye upon me and spoke.

"Excuse me, sir, but do you belong to that steamer that has just arrived?"

"Yes, I am her purser."

"Then you're the very person I'd like to talk to;" and therewith, in fluent and educated speech, he gave me an account of the whole business, including his un-



satisfactory interview with the collector.

Of course, I could not advise, but only sympathize with him and tell him that I had heard of others being victimized in the same shameful fashion.

"Of course, I don't mean to pay even his reduced fine, if I can help it. As soon as I get those passengers who are ashore gathered here, I'll take them on board and tell them my plans. If they give their consent, I'll resist the arrestment by armed force, if necessary; and I'll get everything ready for heaving up and stealing out when the evening breeze comes down from the hills."

"What about the fort?" I asked.

"I don't suppose they'll dare to open fire upon us; but if they do we'll have to take chances. I'll steer so close in that they won't be able to hull us. They may do some damage to our upper gear, but that won't matter much. We'll soon repair it. When do you leave, Mr. Purser?"

"As we are very short of coal and are going on to the Continent, we don't expect to finish till about eight o'clock to-night. It's a slow job here."

"I'll be very glad, then, if you can pay us a visit on your way off to your own ship."

Nothing loath, I accepted, anxious to see and hear a little more of this affair, which promised to afford an interesting break in the monotony of seafaring life.

I was quite satisfied that Captain Warner would carry out his bold resolves, if at all practicable. He was a spare, firmly knit man, rather under the average height, with a countenance that indicated intelligence, force of character, and great determination.

We left the beach together; he going to his agents, to sign his bills, and I proceeding to the market, to make some purchases.

My business being concluded within an hour, I repaired to the shore, where I found Captain Warner and his people, including the party from the hillside, which had been overtaken and brought back with commendable celerity, about to depart for the *Juanita*.

It was quite a scene of bustle and

excitement, the very guides apparently suspecting that there was something in the wind.

Touching first at our steamer to leave the supplies I had with me, I arrived on board the graceful and speckless sailing vessel in time to witness quite a dramatic scene.

All the passengers were on the long poop—a company of well-groomed men and elegantly attired ladies, with a few bright, rosy-cheeked children. The crew were just mustering on the snowy quarter-deck as I stepped over the side.

Captain Warner, after welcoming me and introducing me, in general terms, to the party on the poop, addressing the whole assembly, described the matter to them in concise, pithy terms and told them what he proposed to do, provided he had them with him.

"But," he concluded, "as there will be some risk, I won't carry out my purpose should a single passenger object to the course I have laid down. I'll pay the fine rather than even shake the nervous system of a single person among us. Those who are agreeable that I should go ahead will please step over to the starboard rail. You can take a quarter of an hour to think the matter over. I'd gladly give you longer, ladies and gentlemen, but I expect the arrest party to be here before long. Now, my lads, what do you say?" turning to the crew, and speaking in a sharp, decided tone.

Every man of them at once stepped over to the starboard rail, the boat-swain crying out in a hearty voice:

"Right you are, sir; we're with you all the time."

While a strict disciplinarian, Captain Warner was a humane and generous-minded man, and had made himself very popular with all on board.

The conference among the passengers was a brief one. At its conclusion, one of their number, an American of note, conveyed their decision to the skipper.

"Every one of us—the ladies included, and most enthusiastically, to their credit—support you in your de-

termination to resist this gross imposition," he said. "I myself would be most willing to place my check book at your disposal, and several others have expressed themselves to the same effect; but, as you say, it is a matter of principle, and we feel that we would rather run the risk you have pointed out than gratify these land sharks."

"Three cheers for the skipper!" shouted the boatswain, and this was responded to most heartily, the ladies joining and waving their handkerchiefs in an unmistakable manner.

There now ensued a time of bustling preparation.

Like other ships of her early time in the West Indies trade, the *Juanita* had been equipped with an armory, against the chance attacks of the piratical degenerates that used to infest the Caribbean Sea.

Although the need for it had long since passed, this armory was Captain Warner's peculiar pride and care, and he kept the dozen rifles and cutlasses shining in their racks in his own den, as he called it—the transom end of the saloon, which was partitioned off, and served as his sleeping quarters and chart room.

Picking out the most likely of his crew, he allotted a rifle to each of them. He himself possessed a pair of revolvers, and it transpired that six of the passengers had each one. Thus there was no lack of firearms, and there were the cutlasses and capstan bars to fall back upon. The gentlemen, to a man, offered their services, but Captain Warner told them that he wanted them to be out of any scrimmage that might take place.

The defenses being all in readiness, the captain now dressed the ship with every bit of bunting on board, giving her quite a gay appearance.

The saloon party were just finishing luncheon—to which I had been invited—when the second mate announced that a large rowing boat was approaching the *Juanita*, with armed men in her.

Captain Warner dashed for his den, and appeared on deck in a couple of minutes attired in full uniform, looking

very smart in his frock-coat suit and gold lace.

He wore a scarlet cloth waistbelt, into which were stuck a brace of revolvers, and he had a cutlass at his side.

Every soul on board was now on deck, and all eyes were fixed intently on the approaching boat, which was soon alongside.

She was a large barge—of the warship type—pulled by ten men, and carried four soldiers, armed with short swords and with muskets with fixed bayonets. In charge of her was a young, gayly uniformed officer, who, when the craft was abreast of the *Juanita's* mainmast, demanded, in indolent tones and in broken English, to see the captain.

The latter stepped up onto the rail, and, grasping the forward main shroud to steady himself, said in clear, resolute accents:

"Well, mister, what is it you want? I'm captain of this vessel."

The officer smiled, saluted politely, and replied in quite gracious, insinuating tones:

"Ah, I have pleasure in weeshing you a very good day, capiten. You will please put down one ledder; I am going to arreest your sheep."

"No, you are *not*. I'll lower no ladder. You're not coming on board for any such purpose; not by cloudfuls."

The officer had evidently thought his task would be an easy one, although, doubtless, he had been warned to expect some slight show of resistance.

He now stood up, and in pompous tones read the following from a sheet of parchment:

"Captain Silas B. Warner, in the name of the Republic of Portugal and at the command of his excellency the Governor of Madeira, on the complaint of the collector of customs of the port of Funchal, I am come to arrest your ship for a breach of the laws of the said port, and I demand to be allowed to come on board, to perform my duty."

"You can go back and give my compliments to his excellency, the governor, and tell him that Captain Silas

B. Warner defies both him and Portugal, and doesn't intend to pay any fine nor allow his ship to be arrested."

"Will you not allow a ladder to be lowered, capiten?" asked the officer, looking rather nonplused.

"No, never!" shouted the captain, in a voice of thunder.

The officer spoke to the rowers, who produced a light but strong rope ladder, with a pair of hooks at one end of it. They had come prepared with means of their own for boarding. The officer drew his sword, and the four soldiers looked to their muskets and pointed them toward the rail.

The critical moment had arrived, and all present felt it.

Would Captain Warner yield to authority backed up by force, as so many *mighty* men had done, to the loss of good and even *great* causes, through lack of necessary bravery at the supreme juncture?

Not at all. The intrepid Yankee was made of sterner stuff. There was no lack of physical or moral courage in his tough composition.

Turning to his improvised "jollies," who were drawn up, out of sight, amidships, headed by the mate and second mate, each of whom had a revolver in his grasp—he gave the command:

"Forward, my hearties!" and in an instant twelve muskets and four pistols were pointing at the boat; for Captain Warner, bracing himself against a stay, had whipped out his own pair, which now covered the unfortunate officer.

"Clear out of this, right now!" yelled the captain, his blood fairly up, "or I'll give the word and send you and your boat to Davy Jones' locker. Away with you, and tell your collector that if he is man enough to fight a duel, I'll have pleasure in putting a bullet through him on my quarter-deck here."

The effect was immediate and striking. The officer, who, with his men, looked perfectly thunderstruck, put up his sword—so vainly drawn—the soldiers rested their pieces against their shoulders once more, the rowers took to their oars, and without even dipping her flag in a parting salute the barge

went off hastily toward the shore, amid a round of hearty cheering from those on the quarter-deck of the *Juanita*.

Captain Warner now gave orders for every stitch of canvas to be shaken out, and every spare inch of the cable to be wound taut, that the anchor might be quickly weighed when the breeze came down.

On entering the Bay of Funchal, a long, elevated promontory juts, on the left hand, into the sea, terminating in what are called the Loo Rocks.

Toward the end of this spur there was, at the time of which I speak, a so-called fort, consisting of a few guns and a round, towerlike ammunition magazine.

About an hour after the departure of the barge, a party could be seen on the height, making for this fort, and a crowd of spectators descried on the shore, gathered to watch events.

It had gone round like wildfire that the *Juanita* had repelled the arrest by a show of force, and was going to be cannonaded if she attempted to leave the bay. The whole population was on the *qui vive*.

Eventually there was a stirring of the air; the breeze was coming. Bidding plucky Captain Warner and his no less plucky company good-by and good luck, I left for our steamer, and witnessed from its deck, by the aid of a good pair of glasses, the rather startling scene that followed.

The *Juanita* had been anchored close inshore, and as the light wind swelled her sails, and she stole slowly and majestically seaward, hugging the promontory on her right, it could be seen that the artillerymen were at their posts, and that the passengers of the vessel were crowding her poop.

By and by, as she drew near to the fort, a shot was fired across her course; a second followed; but she still held on, her people cheering, and the ladies waving their handkerchiefs at each heavy report.

A third shot went through her fore-to'gallant sail, and a fourth struck her lofty main royal spar, bringing it and the yard down with a run; but, fortu-



nately, as we learned afterward, injuring no person.

Again the cheers rang forth, and the good ship still wore out, without showing any signal of surrender.

But just when she was presenting a better target to the marksmen, the firing altogether ceased; and soon the daring *Juanita* rounded the point, and was completely out of range, and safe from further molestation.

What caused the firing to come to an end so suddenly, just when it was becoming effective?

Happily for the collector, the governor, and the authorities at Lisbon, there chanced to be *one sane official* involved in the business; and, for being sane, for saving—as it might have happened—a serious situation, his immediate reward was arrest and imprisonment.

His further fate I never learned; but surely, if ever man deserved honor and a pension, it was he.

The member of the firing squad whose duty it was to hand out, from the magazine, the charges as they were required, perceiving the complications that would arise should further damage be done to the *Juanita*, or injury to limb or loss of life to those on board ensue, swung shut the door of the tower when the spar was struck, locked it, and, throwing the heavy key far from him into the water, said to the officer in charge:

"If you are mad enough to carry out the order to fire on the United States flag, I'm not so mad as to go on supplying you with means to do so."

He was the only man of sense, the only truly brave man on the Portuguese side of the affair.

## The Right Mistake

By John D. Emerson

**Bud Hunter of the Two-Cross Ranch, Arizona, hits New York's "Big Street"  
with a bale of yellow boys and puts over a huge  
mistake at the critical moment**

ON the second day of his stay in New York, "Bud" Hunter, late of the Two-Cross Ranch, Arizona, tore up the return half of his stop-over ticket.

"I'm goin' to live in this yere town," he announced to the four walls of his twenty-dollar-a-day suite in the Hotel St. Reckless. "This is the kind o' place I been hankerin' after fer years; it's *my* kind o' town. They's more doin' in a minute to the square inch yere than anywheres else I *ever* was. Mama! What a place! I want to see it all, an' I'm willin' to spend a lifetime doin' it. The only thing is—the only thing is——"

He drew his "wad" out of his pocket. "Seventy-two thousand eight hundred." With a self-satisfied smile, he

snapped the rubber band back around the roll of big bills. "I reckon I can stay fer a spell, anyway. Maybe I'll be a piker, an' all that, but they can't freeze me out till I've sampled my share o' the dee-lights o' this burg; no, sir!"

He looked down at the money in his hand.

"An' now," he said,—"now that I've made up my mind I'm goin' to settle down in this place, before I take a chance on losin' this, I'd better put it in the bank."

Ten minutes later he left the hotel to mingle with the crowd on Broadway. Beneath the flapping brim of his white Stetson, his eyes twinkled with pleasure as they took in the lively scenes of the teeming metropolis about him.

Fortune had favored Bud. For one

thing, here he was at last in the city of his dreams, walking the streets of New York, as he had longed so often to do, his pockets bulging with ready money. And perhaps that wasn't luck!

Riding home along the dried-out river bottom of the San Jacinto one sundown, his horse had tripped on something and thrown him over her head.

When he picked himself up, after rolling across twenty yards of the surrounding landscape, he found sticking to his clothes among the cactus spines and gravel approximately one hundred dollars' worth of pure gold dust.

Thus was the New Golconda Gold Mine uncovered. At the time, a party of Eastern capitalists were stopping at the Two-Cross Ranch for purposes of pleasure and health.

These Bud straightway sought out with his proposition, which was to relieve him of the labor of mining out the ore on his discovery by the spot-cash purchase of his interest in the same.

From his interview with the moneyed gentlemen, he emerged, carrying their certified check for seventy-five thousand dollars.

The first train East found Bud on board. And here he was, treading the hallowed ground of New York, his dream come true.

Yet it was an anxious-eyed, worried Bud who swung his gangling, six-foot-three way toward the desk of the Hotel St. Reckless a half hour after he left its portals.

"Pardner," he addressed the clerk with Western familiarity, "I'm in some little trouble, which the same you can help me out of if you'd be so kind."

The personage surveyed the young man with languid eyes which seemed suspended like disks of expressionless glass a very long way from the eyebrows.

"Certainly," he remarked as by an effort.

"I hail from the West," said the ex-cowboy. "Out there we do things in some of a small way, as you might know. Usual, when a man wants to put

his money in the bank, he goes to town an' caches his savin's in the First National. It's the only place they is. But yere, dog my cats, you've got a bank on pretty near every corner!"

The clerk raised his eyebrows still higher.

"There are quite a number of banks," he enunciated slowly, "here in the city."

"You're right, there are!" nodded Bud. "An' that's just the point. I want to ask you which is the best one fer me to put my money in? I've got seventy-two thousand eight hundred dollars yere in my pants pocket——"

He started to drag out his yellow-backed roll. The clerk looked him over in a casual way, raised a lily-white hand to his lips, and yawned.

"I must ask you to excuse me," he said. "I'm very busy this morning. Another time and I will be glad to joke with you. Not just now, though."

He turned his back.

Bud stared at him with his mouth open. Then he turned and stumped across the lobby in his high-heeled boots.

"Didn't believe I had the money," he told himself. "Well, well! But that don't matter none to me. That's all right!"

At the cigar stand he paused, and asked for a bag of Durham.

"We don't handle the cheaper brands," said the salesman curtly. "At some of the stores along the street you may find what you want."

"It don't make no difference," said the stranger in town, crossing his legs and leaning with one elbow against the show case. "What I want to find out from you is the name of a good, safe, reliable bank yere in this city. They's so many of 'em starin' you in the eye ever' which way you turn, I'm some confused as to find out which one I'll let take charge o' my money. You see, I've got somethin' over seventy thousand dollars in bills rammed away in my pocket——"

And for the second time Bud went down after his wad.

"H'mm!" grunted the cigar-stand clerk. "Nickel tobacco and Rockefel-

ler's income don't go well together, young man. You're either a runaway from some asylum out to kid the public for your own amusement, or working some kind of an advertising dodge in that backwoods make-up. Nothing doing. Trot right along. This is my busy day."

Bud reddened. He opened his mouth to speak, then shut it with a snap. Wheeling, he walked out on the front steps, and filled his lungs with several deep breaths.

"Oh, shucks!" he blurted at length. "What's the odds? Them fellers is so stuck up from associatin' with rich folks that they can't talk civil to a plutocrat in the disguise o' a plain, ever'day body. I know what I'll do. I'll hunt up somebody that's a leetle mite more of a good feller."

There was a bootblack stand in the shelter of the steps. Bud descended, and tapped the idle custodian of the chair on the suspender buckle. He turned around.

"Friend," said the son of the West, "I'm up a tree. Perhaps you can help me out. I'm lookin' fer a bank that's sound an' worthy to put my money in. You see, there's so blame many institooshuns o' that caliber fer a man to choose from that I'm more'n a littel perplexified to know which one to use. Can't you tell me? I don't want to carry this seventy-two thousand dollars around loose with me no longer'n I can help——"

Once more Bud was struggling to exhum the roll from his pocket.

"Beat it!" exploded the bootblack. "What d'ye think I am, some Joe Maggee that you c'n jolly fer a good thing? I'm wise. You're a nut, crazy as a loon. If you had seventy thousand cents, you wouldn't be here. G'wan, now, or I'll put one over on you. Sneak!"

There was a pained expression on the cowboy's ruddy face as he turned away a third time with his question unanswered. The look vanished, however, as he caught the eye of a man with a large, black mustache who was standing by with his lips parted in a friendly smile. Bud stepped up to him.

"You heard what I just said, mister," he began eagerly. "I'm huntin' fer a first-class bank. I'm a stranger in town, an' I don't know rightly which to choose out o' all the establishments I see around me. Could you tell me, please, where'd be a safe place to put seventy-two thousand dollars an' some odd chicken feed which I'm carryin' aroun' on my personality——"

The stranger jerked his head in a signal for Bud to draw away with him out of earshot of the bootblack.

"When they ran horse cars up this avenue," he said, "in the days when Forty-second Street was Harlem, you might have got away with it. But not now. Take off the funny clothes. You couldn't rope a resident of East Orange, N. J., with that comedy outfit and drop-stitch line of talk. I'm telling you straight, it's no use."

The cowboy stared.

"Say!" he gasped. "Say, what do you think I am? A confidence man?"

"Peace, little one," said the other. "You're among friends. I've been working this beat for the last eight years, and I know what I'm talking about when I tell you you're on the wrong track. Didn't you ever hear of 'Silver' Connelly, the prize wire tapper and gold-brick manipulator of the bunch? That's me. Take it from one who knows whereof he speaks when he warns a beginner at the game that he's in Dutch. You won't do."

This time Bud got his money out.

"Look at that!" he cried, flashing the yellow bundle under the other's nose. "Does that look like I was bluffin' you, workin' a swindler's game—eh?"

The black-mustached stranger looked bored.

"Appears to be fairly clever green goods," he commented. "But you'll never peddle any of it in that get-up. You've got it put on too thick. It's coarse work."

The next person Bud approached was a cop.

"Excuse me, Mr. Sheriff," he said, "but I'm inquirin' aroun' to ascertain the entitlements of a bank that'll be a secure an' mob-proof repository fer my



money. It's this yere way. I see so many places all doin' business under the general name o' banks that I'm plumb dizzy at tryin' to figure out which one's safe an' which ain't. Can't you kindly help me out by supplyin' the name of one out o' 'em all that I could trust with this seventy thousand dollars an' over I'm carryin' careless like an' unprotected about in my clothes?"

As he attempted to haul forth his wealth, a night stick pressed against his ribs.

"Move right along," growled the policeman. "Don't come around with any such hot air as that to me. 'Less you want me to run you in, that is. I see you're crazy, but you don't look like the harmful kind. Just be on your way, and don't kick up a fuss, and nobody'll bother you."

Bud stepped to the curb.

He lifted his head, and for five minutes the air around him was blue with his remarks, unprintable in the main, relative to the courtesies accorded strangers in the busy, indifferent, cold-blooded, and pig-headed metropolis.

"A simple question," he wound up tearfully, "an' nary soul will gimme an answer—not one. Down my way they wouldn't treat the meanest greaser that onfeelin' an' rude, no matter what he'd done. An' I ain't done nothin'. Jes' simply an' in a def'rential way asked what's a good bank to put my coin inter."

Looking up, he saw that the opposite corner was occupied by a large, granite building bearing the gilt-lettered insignia upon its plate-glass windows: "Nineteenth National Bank of New York." And something else he noticed, too.

A crowd extending around the corner and halfway up the side street was in line before the door of the institution. There were men and women and messenger boys in the crowd. Now and then they surged out of line and swarmed in a shoving, wildly gesticulating mob about the front door, only to be pushed back into single file by six broad-shouldered special policemen.

"Well, dang my buttons!" muttered Bud Hunter. "Dang my buttons!"

He stared at the crowd besieging the bank with wide eyes.

"All fightin' to get their money in!" he mused in wonder. "Well, sir, that certainly must be some bank. No use talkin', straws show which way the wind blows. If the crowd acts up like that to get their cash put inside that place, it oughter mean the place's O. K. an' more. If it's good enough for them, by Joe, it's good enough fer me!"

And with that he hurried across the street. No waiting in line for him. He had been delayed long enough in getting his cash into some place of safe-keeping already. Now, unless he hurried, the bank might refuse to take any more money for that day, and he would be left out in the cold.

Diving into his pocket, he pulled forth the roll of bills with such haste that the rubber band broke. The yellowbacks fluttered out in his hand; with the bundle waving over his head, he charged the crowd, at the same time emitting a wild yell familiar to many a stampeding herd of cattle on the Two-Cross Ranch.

Like chaff before the wind, the throng parted at his hurtling advance. It was due not so much to his superior weight and strength that he plowed with ease through the ranks of waiting folk; they spread in front of him, eyes and mouths open with astonishment, of their own will and volition.

Breathless, perspiring, he bounded into the marble-tiled foyer of the bank. Right before him was a window labeled "Receiving Teller." Strangely nobody was in front of it; the line that continued from the street outside ran around the grille cage to a window on the opposite side.

"An unprotected corner!" Bud panted, throwing himself toward the window, which he judged to be a way of getting their cash into the vaults of the institution which the crowd had passed unnoticed. "It's my only chance!"

He slammed his money down on the marble ledge.

"Take it, take it!" he bawled at the startled clerk within. "There's seventy-two thousand dollars, cold cash. Wait—here's eight hundred more. Here, I'll add this two hundred small change——"

He stopped. The clerk had fainted.

And now there was a crowd in back of Bud. Men and women coming from the other side of the grille cage, money in their hands, stopped, looked at the pile of bills on the ledge in front of the receiving teller's window, then silently ranged themselves in line behind the cowboy.

Another teller had relieved the unconscious custodian of the window. Bud's money went into the cage. He took the certificate of deposit hastily made out, and then the press of countless numbers behind him pushed him away.

"That stops the worst run in years!" he heard a man say from somewhere in his rear. "Another ten minutes and the bank would have been busted sure. Close shave, all right!"

Bud wheeled. He was looking into the white face of an elderly gentleman in a wilted collar. The latter gripped his hand.

"I don't know who you are, sir!" he said quaveringly. "But you've done us a service this day that we can never repay. Utter ruin was staring us in the face. You came just in time to save us. Without you, I hate to think of the consequences——" He stopped, shaking his head.

The young man clung to his hand with a grip of steel.

"Lemme understand this," he whispered, his eyes starting out of his head. "Them people stampedin' to get into this bank, they was all aimin' to take their money *out* 'stead of puttin' it in? They's somethin' wrong with this bank? Oh, Lord—an' my money's gone, gone!"

The cashier of the Nineteenth National smiled faintly.

"I don't understand all that you say," he remarked. "But your money is *not* gone. Enough of our depositors have been reassured by seeing you put your currency in our hands, and have re-deposited the cash they withdrew, to put the bank on a sound footing again. The danger is passed, thanks to your help. Any time you want your money back again, you may have it."

Bud held out his certificate in a trembling hand.

"I want it," he said, "quick!"

Bud Hunter does not live in New York. The place of his permanent residence is a town of eight hundred inhabitants in the middle of Arizona.

The place can't compare for amusements, hotels, or epicurean food with New York—as Bud himself often sadly admits.

But, on the other hand, as he invariably concludes his remarks in praise of the Eastern metropolis—with a fond glance across the street at a certain red-brick building bearing across its front the sign, "First National of Sleeping Valley"—in Sleeping Valley there is only one bank.

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### The Airship a Word Maker

SCIENCE keeps well ahead of those who make the dictionaries. Aviation has added rapidly to the world's vocabulary. Aviation itself, from the Latin *avis*, a bird, is happily coined, for the monoplanes and biplanes, with which such wonderful triumphs have been scored, are sprawling imitations of soaring birds.

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### The Frisky Automobile

SALESMAN—"Let me show you our latest machines. We have a motor car now that can climb any hill on earth."

Chauffeur—"That's nothing. The last one you sold me tried to climb a tree."

# The Wonderful Adventures of Cap'n Wiley

Written by Himself.

Revised by the Editor.

**You can begin the naughty biography here.**

At the age of sweet sixteen Walter Wiley runs away from home along with his faithful dog Fido, and starts to walk to Boston.

They encounter sundry adventures, but at last, having no money, they find themselves in danger of starving.

At this crisis they come to a river into which an elephant from a circus has fallen, and for whose rescue the circus man is wildly offering five hundred dollars reward.

After super-canine efforts the elephant is saved by Fido, but the rascally circus man repudiates his promise, and offers Wiley five dollars, which he finally takes, and spends on a big dinner for himself and faithful Fido.

After several more adventures, Wiley and Fido arrive in Boston, where he challenges the Harvard varsity crew to a rowing race.

He has some trouble getting a boat, owing to his lack of funds, but finally secures a square-ended punt, in which, after giving them a start of half the course, he beats the Harvard crew, Fido steering the punt with his tail.

But alas, the speed is so great that the friction sets fire to the punt, and Wiley is forced to leap overboard, but the faithful dog sticks to his post until the boat has passed the finishing mark, when he succumbs and is burned to a crisp.

By a curious chain of circumstances, and his own extraordinary cleverness, he manages to get five hundred dollars, with which he proceeds to cut a wide swath.

Having decked himself in radiant raiment, he goes to a baseball game, and finds that the catcher of the Boston's is an old friend. At this man's invitation, he shows the team what he can do in the pitching line, and does such marvelous work that the manager offers him \$20,000 for the rest of the season.

He accepts, and pitches several games, using his celebrated "stop ball" with such effect that the other side doesn't get one hit.

But his phenomenal work makes enemies, and one night he is knocked on the head, and, when he recovers, finds himself in a balloon with two masked men eight miles above the earth. After a struggle he is hurled out and falls with frightful velocity, but suddenly his flight is checked, and he finds himself immersed in water.

Swimming to the top, he discovers that he has fallen into a cloud so surcharged with water that it is practically a floating lake, but though he is safe for the moment he is still in terrible danger.

Presently the cloud strikes a mountaintop and in the cloudburst that follows he is precipitated to the earth, where, after being whirled about for a while, something strikes his head, and he is rendered unconscious.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE BRIGANDS' CAVE.

WHEN I recovered my senses—some envious-minded persons have imputed that I never had any sense to recover—I found myself in a huge, rapacious cavern, bound hand and foot and seated upon the ground, with my back against a dank wall. I lay limpidly in an declining position.

A short distance away a fire of fagots burned, and by the radium of that fire I saw bending over me a tall, dark man, with the face of an old Spanish caramba. This man was armed to the teeth, the belt that served as the Mason and Dixon's line of his anatomy supporting several pistols, which looked as if they had been recovered from the ruins of Ninevah, not to mention numerous keen-edged inuendos.

"Ha!" he breathed, with intense satisfaction, as my silken eyelashes lifted and revealed the wondrous glory of my illustrious orbs.

He then made a few remarks in some fur on language which, I regret to say, in spite of my extraneous education, I could not fully understand.

"Come down," said I sweetly. "Swallow that mouthful before you attempt to talk."

He uttered a cry, at the sound of which several more fierce men, all unwholesomely armed, came hurrying out of the darkness. They stood around and looked at me, and chewed up a whole lot of sound that may have been intended in good faith as conversation, but which, for the most part, gave me



the impression that they had all caught cold and were gargling their throats.

"If you expect me to understand," said I, "you'll have to get an interloper. I'm just as anxious to chat with you as you are with me, for I'd like to know where I am at and how I came at it. You'll do me an infinitesimal favor by removing these restraining bondages from my ankles and wrists. I fain would stretch my cramped limbos."

They gargled some more, after which two of them hurried away.

In a short time the pair returned, conducting a maiden so lavishly beautiful that I nearly bit my heart in two when I shut my teeth to keep it from jumping out of my mouth. She had raving black hair, a rosebug mouth, curly white teeth—— But what's the use; I'll get all mixed up if I attempt to describe her. Suffice it to say, at first sight I decided that she could warm her beans at my camp fire.

"*Buenas dias*," said she.

"Does it?" said I. "I'll take your word for it. Anything you say goes with me."

Immediately she uttered a joyous cry.

"Why," said she, "you speak English. You are not a Mexican?"

"Not to my knowledge," said I. "If I am, I've become one recently when I wasn't looking."

"What are you doing here?" she questioned.

"Not much at present, thank you. I am prevented from doing much of anything by the restraining force of circumstances. I wish you would tell me where I am, anyhow."

"Don't you know where you are?"

"I do not. And, while I am aware that ignorance is a blister, as the man said who attempted to steal a hot flat-iron, my innate curiosity makes me burn for inflammation. I played my last date in Boston."

"You are an American, but you are in Mexico now," said she.

"I declare," said I, "I must have traveled somewhat precociously while I was in that balloon and that extremely moist cloudlet. Mexico? It certainly is a long stroll back to Boston."

"Ah!" sighed the beautiful maiden, with a detonation of intense sorrow and regret. "I fear you'll never see your native land again."

"Don't say that," I impugned. "Why do you entertain such a disturbing thought?"

"Because," she answered, "you have fallen into the clutches of desperate brigands, who believe you to be a spy and mean to put you to death."

## CHAPTER XII.

### A SPY.

"Quit your tickling," said I. "If I get to laughing, I may offend these tomalies foregathered around us, and, everything considered, I'm a trifle anxious not to do that. Can't you disband their minds of the erroneous confiction that I am a spy? I hope, if possible, you'll flavor me by so doing."

"Alas!" she sobbed. "I can do nothing. I fear there is no escape."

"Don't say that," I entreated. "If you can induce them to postpone my execration a few hours, I may find a method of escaping. Why, I was put in jail once, but I got the measles and broke out. While there is life there may be a chance to slope."

"If Benedictine, the chief, were only here," said she, "I would appeal to him. But he is away on a spree at the nearest town."

"I am led to confer that the chief is conspicuous by his absinthe," I retorted. "Then who is the pickle-faced old skeezicks who seems to be in charge of the combination?"

"That," she whispered, "is Lothario, the lieutenant. He is in love with me, and has sworn to lead me unwillingly to the halter. I loathe him."

She hissed the words with a dramatic intensity which proclaimed that she possessed a natural talon for the stage, and I decided immediately that she would make a hit in the ballot of some Broadway musical imposition.

"Tell me your name," I urged; "and how came you in such undesirable company?"

"Among these brigands," she an-

swered, "I am known as Mary Skeeno, but I have a rank suspicion that it is not my real handle. Something tells me that, when a very small child, I was abdicated by these monsters, and I apprehend that my long-lost parents are scandalously overburdened with dough."

"I am willing to wager," said I, "that, no matter how much dough they have, you were the flour of the family."

At that very moment, despite my position and the presence of the robbers, I was tempted to ask her to be my finance. It was only by wonderful self-restraint that I conquered my disposition to do so.

During the time that we had been talking, Lothario, the lieutenant, did not once take his evil eyes off us, and he stood so near that I could perceive by the flavor of his breath that he had been drinking. His suspicions aroused, he now seized the beautiful maiden rudely by the wrist, and began rapidly tying language into hard knots and double hitches and running loops, all the while making disagreeable gestures toward me with his free hand.

"He says," explained the girl, "that he knows you are a spy."

"Tell him," I returned, "that, having smelled his breath, I decline to brandy words with him."

"He insists that you shall be shot at once."

"Kindly inform him that I object, although, if he is willing to stand treat, I'll agree to be half shot."

"Hist!" she whispered, as Lothario turned for a moment and gave some orders to his men. "I had laid my plans to attempt to escape while Benedictine was absent, and I have removed all the bullets from their pistols. They can't shoot you without reloading their weapons."

"I must say that the statement of your account has restored my balance," I murmured. "But, quick, while they are not looking, give me the bullets. Put them into my mouth. Tell them I will catch the bullets in my teeth when they fire at me."

With a readiness that declaimed her a maiden of resource, she produced a handful of bullets, and poured them into

my mouth as I held the receptacle open to receive them.

Then, as those dastardly wretches lifted me rudely to my feet and placed me in the full conflagration of the fire, with my back against the cavern wall, our ears were disturbed by a sound which reminded me of a Frenchman singing the mayonnaise.

The singing grew more and more instinct, and presently Benedictine, the chief, staggered forth into the chamber, loaded down with a tremendous bun.

Mary Skeeno flew to him at once, handing him out a string of talk which seemed to be an explanation of the situation. I could see that she was appealing to Benedictine in my behalf, and I waited the outcome in suspension.

Lothario was not disposed to let her have everything her own way, and, striding over, he joined in the talkfest. I knew he was saying that I was a spy and should be shot without further descention; nevertheless, I had hopes that the maiden might prevail.

My hopes were shattered when old Benedictine gave what seemed to be a thick cheer for crime, and told Lothario to go on with the matinée.

Then, as the lieutenant lined half a dozen ruffians up before me, about ten feet distant, every man with his pistol in hand, the girl left Benedictine struggling to maintain his equilabraham, and fired a few hot shots at old Lothario.

She ended by saying to me in good United States:

"Keep your nerve. I've told them that you say you will catch their bullets in your teeth."

It was plain that the idea amused them fluently, for, one and all, they were shouting with laughter; in fact, they were having genuine revulsions of mirth.

I couldn't see anything to laugh at. I was thinking that, by some oversight, Mary might have failed to remove the bullets from one or more of those pistols. In that case I knew I'd soon be selecting my wings or having my measurements taken for an asbestos suit. I'll admit that I could feel cold chills

creeping up and down my spiral staircase.

If I should live to be a centaurian, I'd never forget the anguish of those few fleeting moments.

All too soon those wretches put the soft petal on their merriment and squared themselves for business. Lothario gave a command, and I found myself looking into the yearning muzzles of half a dozen pistols which were leveled straight at me.

As became a true American, I did not flinch. I was too frightened to do that or anything else.

Again Lothario cried a word of command.

Fire and smoke blanched from the muzzles of those leveled pistols, and a crash of sound corroborated through the cavern chamber.

For a moment or two I was not dead sure whether I was dead or not. When I decided that I was really still alive and unshoten, I felt like singing a peon of praise.

The bandits were staring at me in bewildered amazement as the cloud of powder smoke slowly rose toward the roof of the chamber.

Bethinking myself, I drew back my lips from my teeth, leaned forward slightly, and slowly conjectured from my mouth the bullets supplied by the girl. As those lead pills rattled down upon the hard stones at my feet, some of the robbers showed symptoms of mental abrogation. I thought they were going crazy for sure, and I hoped they would if they only went far enough away while they were going.

Old Lothario himself was dazed.

He, however, was the first to recover.

With a snarl of fury, he snatched his own pistol from the hostler of his belt, stepped forward almost within arm's length, and fired squarely at my head.

I have carried around a few powder flakes from that pistol ever since, giving me a sort of pepper-and-salt appearance.

It chanced that one lone bullet had crept away and lodged beneath my tongue. Immediately I leaned forward again, and spat that solitary bullet out.

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Lothario gave a yell, threw up both feet, and fell full and fair upon the spot where his back collar button would have been located if he had used one.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### THE CAP'N BECOMES A BANDIT.

I had them going, all right. Even Benedictine himself was sobered by my amazing performance. Striding forward, he gave orders that I was to be unbound at once, which gave me unbounded pleasure. However, I did not fall on his neck and kiss him. Had we been quite alone by ourselves, I might have taken a chance and fallen on his neck; but, being outnumbered as I was, I abided my time.

Mary Skeeno was rejoiced by the turn of affairs.

"You're all right now," she said. "You're a lulu."

"No," said I, "I'm a Yankee."

"Oh, yes," she nodded. "It's always easy to tell a Yankee."

"But you can't tell him much," I returned. "Now, there was a knowing fellow in my home town by the name of Doctor Busybee. One day he lighted a match to look into a benzine can to see if it was perfectly empty."

"What happened?" she asked.

"He hasn't benzine since," I answered. "He didn't know that the can could, but, to be candid, the can did. There was a report that he went away somewhere."

About this time Mr. Lothario, who had been so greatly decomposed, recovered, and made frantic demands of Benedictine that he should be permitted to take a few more shoots at me just to make sure that he had not been dreaming.

As near as I could make out, Benedictine invited him to go to a place which he designated by the popular synonym for war. Lothario didn't seem to like it, but it was plain that Benny didn't give a mill-pond restrainer whether he liked it or not.

Finding that he could not get me exterminated, Lothario did the next worst,



and insisted that I should be installed as one of the cohort of robbers.

"What is he saying?" was the question I put to Mary as the old boy continued to argue with the chief.

"He says that you must join the band."

"Join the band! Great impersonal Cæsar! Why, I can't even blow a base drum. Still, as I am pretty dry and my nerves are shaky, if they insist on it, I suppose I'll have to take a horn."

"What do you think this is," she inquired, "a Sousa concert or a bar-room? I guess you'll have to yield, for Benedictine is giving in. He agrees that you are to be sworn into the band."

I was willing enough to swear. I felt just like it. And I did when they ordered me to hold up both hands and both feet while the oath of fealty was being administered. I wondered what sort of a legerdermaniac they took me for, and I asked Mary. She replied by stating that *she* was ready to take me for better or worse, blushing shyly as she made the modest statement.

The oath they handed out to me must have been something frightful to judge by the sound of it as it trickled from Benedictine's lips. However, not understanding a single word of it, and feeling it was my only chance to escape with my private person intact, I cheerfully agreed to every item.

When it was all over, Mary informed me that I had pledged myself to prove my loyalty by going out at an early hour on the morrow, and killing and robbing a peaceful old settler who lived within a mile or two of the robbers' cave.

As she explained this to me, I realized that I was being closely watched by the auspicious lieutenant, who quickly said something to Mary.

"Lothario wants to know," said she, "if you shirk."

"Tell him that I do not," I returned stoutly; "but that I feel that the job will be a settler for me."

Having taken me into his happy family, Benedictine felt so good that he gave orders for a banquet of rejoicing. This was not at all displeasing to my fancy, as I hadn't eaten anything since

leaving Boston, and, considering the distance I had traveled on an empty stomach, I knew it must be long past breakfast time.

Mary seemed very happy, and she deployed her time in light converse with me while the chefs of the bandit outfit got busy preparing the repasture we were to enjoy. We scarcely minded the evil glances of old Lothario, who leered upon us constantly, pea-green with jealousy and chagrin.

I was happy, also, for had I not won the fair maiden according to her own proposal! I began to think of the future—of a little cottage for two, with running water and cemetery plumbing.

I once knew an undertaker who brought a house with cemetery plumbing. But don't look grave, anxious reader. I won't tell that story, for I promised the undertaker that I'd be dead quiet about it.

In due time the banquet was served, and we defiled into an adjourning chamber of the cave which was brilliantly lighted with many flamingoes.

There upon a long table was the feast. I can't begin to enumerate all there was to cause indigestion on that table; but I know there were hot pomeranians and chinchillas and various other native dishes served a la dumpcart. Everything I tasted was as hot as Tobacco sauce, but I did my duty like a man.

Mary, sitting at my side, was light-hearted and gay. In the midst of proceedings, she proposed that we should have wine, to which Benedictine, whose edge was getting a trifle dull, readily agreed.

The fair maiden brought the wine with her own hands and filled the glasses.

At one end of the table there was a raised platform, and, with his overflowing glass in his hand, Benedictine mounted the nostrum and made a charming spooch, which set everybody except Lothario into gales of laughter. Through it all, however, the lieutenant continued to gaze at me with malice aforethought, and I took occasion to murmur in Mary's shell-like ear that I

anticipated more or less disturbance from the gentleman.

"Don't worry," she answered lightly. "We'll soon be far from here, you and me. The wine is drugged, with the deception of the bottle from which I poured our own. You will soon behold the entire band pass into pellucid slumber."

It was quite true. One by one they began to drop off.

Lothario, however, had drunk less than the others, having taken scarcely a swallow; and it is a well-known fact that one swallow does not make a bumper.

With his suspicions aroused, he suddenly rose to his feet, uttering a bastinado of rage. Snatching forth one of his keenest inuendos, he sprang at me.

I knew what I had to do, and I did it sufficiently. Sidestepping with lightninglike rapidity, I smote him a smit on the side of the head that crushed his skull like an eggshell, skinning my knuckles somewhat painfully in the performance.

"Come," said Mary, grasping my arm as I stood looking down at the lifeless wretch. "We must hit a few of the tallest hubbles. It is our move if we expect to reach the king row in this game."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE FLIGHT.

The treasure room of the cave was gorged to its full rapacity with leather sacks containing golden sequences and macaroons. I could scarcely believe that my eyes beheld so much treasure; even now I can scarcely believe it. In my enthusiasm over the shocking spectacle of so much money that was not working, I acted like a drowning man. I embraced my fair life preserver.

"Mary," said I, planting an ocillation on her ruby lips, "if we can get away with a proportionate proportion of this swag, we'll swagger around Squeedunk, Michigan, and Skowhegan, Maine, and other capitals of the earth, in capital style. You shall have vermin furs and diamond ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ays and other

costly trinkets and bubbles to please the most indelicate fancy."

She sighed with rapture at the prospectus.

"And you," she said; "you, my hero—this boodle will enable you to do grand things, to make a name for yourself, perhaps even to become infamous."

"As to that," I returned, "give me plenty of mazuma, and I'll refrain content to let others struggle for fame and glory."

"Ah," said she, "it's a splendid thing to leave footprints on the sands of time."

"I have observed," I retorted sagaciously, "that while some few men try to leave footprints on the sands of time, the great majority are kept busy trying to cover their tracks."

We lost no further precious time in parsimonious conversation. Mary knew where the horses of the bandits were kept, and she brought twenty of them up to the mouth of the cave, while I threw myself into a leaking perspiration sacking out the sacks of golden coin.

But when we had overburdened eighteen of those animals with the stuff that buys meal tickets, leaving two for us to ride, there still remained such an extortionate amount of good money in the treasure chamber that I was fain to shed tears of vexation and regret.

Mary seemed slightly peeved at this.

"Come on," said she. "With all these rocks you'll be a Rockyfeller now. What do you want, anyhow?"

"I fear," said I, "that after we have reached a haven of refuge, I'll be sorely tempted to spend the rest of my life trying to compete just how many beers I could have purchased with the bones we are leaving behind us."

"We'll be fortunate, indeed," was her soothing assurance, "if we get away without leaving our own bones behind us. Benedictine and the rest of the bunch are not going to remain doped forever, and it is safe to desert that they will be somewhat annoyed when they survive and find that you have departed taking me with you. Imagine their commotions when they look into the

treasure chamber and discover the rift in the loot."

"I fear it is true that they will be vexed," I agreed. "Hence we will hurry henceward. What, ho away! as my dear old father used to say when he set me at work in the potato patch."

I gave her my hand, and assisted her to bound lightly to the back of a coal-black charger that had been reserved for her to ride. Then I mounted my own Arabian seed, which had but remotely been the property of Lothario himself, and we set forth upon our flight. Could we have increased our speed, I would have been perfectly willing to set fifth or sixth—or even more.

I will not go into retail concerning our journey through the lonely, majestic mountains and across wide, celluloid plains, where our path was made slippery and uncertain by the grease from the greasewood trees, and wild cats peered at us from the shelter of the cactus plants. It must be understood that the rapidity of our locomotion was somewhat impoverished by the eighteen heavily loaded pack horses which we had employed to transmute the gold to the confines of civilization.

Mary had thoughtfully negotiated a supply of food from the larder of the brigands, and therefore we did not suffer from the need of provisions.

During the second day of our journey, I made some impertinences regarding my fair companion's belief that she was the daughter of wealthy parents, and had been confiscated by Benedictine, the bandit, when she was too young and tender to have any reflection of the affair.

"You were brought up among Mexicans," said I. "Your hair and eyes are black as a craven's wing, and your skin has a beautiful pimola inflection. Why should you feel so sure that you are an American?"

"Even though," she retorted, "I have sorejourned from early infancy with men who spoke nothing but doggerel Spanish, you must take an oat, as the man said to the horse, that I am absolutely efficient in the English language, which I speak luminously."

"I am convicted," I instigated salvely. "But why do you consider yourself the daughter of wealthy parents?"

"I have a strawberry birthmark on my left arm."

"Enough! Enough!" I cried. "There is now no question in the category. You are a lost heiress, and nothing now remains except for me to get tied up to you before your doting parents can prevent the union without paying damages."

But we were not yet out of the woods.

Early on the third day, much to my consternation, we deciphered a large body of horsemen coming in swift pursuit of us, and, though we urged our cumbered animals to their utmost, the pursuers drew near with extraneous precipitancy.

To add to and multiply our dismay, we recognized the pursuers as the bandits from whom we had fled, led by old Benedictine himself, who was scorching the air in his vicinity with his agitated remarks.

"We are lost!" cried Mary.

"No, we are found, confound it!" said I. "They will be on us directly. What is to be did?"

"Our pack animals are delaying us. We must relinquish them."

Alas! there was no other altercation; there was no other method by which we could save our lives, and I was afraid I would miss mine if I lost it. So, with pangs undecipherable, I finally agreed to relinquish the pack horses and all the wealth with which I had hoped to glut my thirst of affluence.

But even when we did this, those disagreeable brigands were not satisfied. They continued to pursue us, evidently bent like crooks on my destitution and the recapture of the maiden.

Suddenly Mary's horse stumbled and broke his right-hand forward propeller.

Fortunately, although the poor girl was jolted some by the discussion when she struck the ground, she was not outwardly cracked, although I feared she might be infernally injured.

Swooping near in a half circle, I caught her up from the ground and



lifted her to the weathers of my gallant beast.

Away we went like the wind, with the pursuers chincatterning jubilously over our exigency.

Suddenly Mary uttered a piercing shriek of despair.

"Look!" she wailed. "Ahead of us lies the Grand Cañon of the Maduro! It is a mile wide and as deep as debt. Our goose is pickled!"

## CHAPTER XIV.

### A MARVELOUS JUMP.

There seemed to be no escape. Knowing what lay before us, the bandits had deployed to the right and left, thus making it impossible for us to turn either way. Ahead of us yawned that terrible spasm. Even to this day I sometimes awake from my dreams bathed in inspiration at the memory of that awful moment.

I attempted to grind my teeth in despair, but there was no grindstone convenient.

"We will perish bravely, my own," I said, taking a farewell look into her peekaboo eyes. "I shall attempt to jump the cañon. Of course, it is barely possible that we may fail, but this is a great horse, and we don't really know what he may be able to accomplish."

So, casting a shout of defiance over my left shoulder blade, I sunk the spurs into the heaving sides of the noble animal, and dashed straight at the blink of the cañon.

My horse never faltered. Reaching the edge, he put all his energy into one mighty leap, and hurled himself through the air with tremendous expulsion.

Never before—and scarcely ever since—did I see a jump like that. I give you my undefined word of horror that we rose and went sailing through the air like a brand-new derby on a windy day.

On and on we sored over that wide gulp, and, almost before you could believe it, we had alighted safely on the other side.

Then the cyclone that had swooped down on us and picked us up and car-

ried us safely over, placing the full mile's breadth of the cañon between us and our baffled pursuers, went on its way rejoicing, tearing up trees and playfully tossing huge bowlders through the air.

For it had been a cyclone, possibly aroused and put into action by the violent language of Benedictine, which had created a great disturbance in the atmospheric conditions, that had obligingly ferried us over the Grand Cañon of the Maduro.

The bandits were now completely foiled. Looking back, we could see them on the far side of that extensive dent in the face of the landscape, shaking their fists impotently and defiling the lexicon with their comments on our behavior.

Laughing lightly and waving a disagreeable farewell, we cantered onward.

The narration of my surprising adventures on this my first land voyage away from my native heath approaches dissolution. I trust the indulgent reader has not been thus affected by the truthful enumeration.

We reached United States territory in a more or less distraught condition, although quite intact.

But when we presented ourselves before a parson and asked to be spliced, I was regarded with doubt and questioned concerning my years on this mundane spear. Being always verbosely truthful, I was compelled to confess that I was a sort of b minor; the minister called me a flat, and that produced a discord.

Would you believe it? We could find no one who would unite us in the holy bonds of agony.

When we found that no one could be inveigled into taking the job, we were nearly heartbroken with relief.

I then advertised in the newspapers for the parents of a kidnaped and long-lost daughter, stating that only persons of wealth and high standing in the immunity where they resided need apply.

In due time a wealthy soup manufacturer of Kalamazoo answered, stating that his only child, a sweet baby, had

been syraptitiously extricated from its cradle seventeen years predominant, and had never even written a line to explain why she left home so suddenly. He mentioned that the child had sustained a strawberry birthmark on her left arm less than a yard above the elbow.

That settled it. Mary was the missing heirloom.

I accompanied her to Kalamazoo and restored her to the arms of her rejoicing parents, amid a scene of great disturbance. I was rewarded most incompatibly. The happy father even offered me half a dozen cans of his soup, but I told him—I had far rather have a check for two or three hundred thousand dollars.

He didn't give me quite as much as

that; but I did manage to pry a fairly acceptable sum away from him.

With that money I purchased outfit of clothing. Some prejudiced persons were disinclined to call it an outfit. One envious individual designated it as a catelliptic fit.

After all this expense for raiment, I had enough money left to buy a railroad ticket home.

[Here ends the first spasm of Cap'n Wiley's "naughtybiography." The editor, the publishers, and the printers who have seen it are all under the care of competent physicians and nurses, and hopes are generally entertained for their recovery. It is hoped that there may be no widespread fatalities among the reading public.]

THE END.

## At the Tape

By J. Raymond Elderdice

The fourth man in the relay race at old Delaware College springs a big surprise on opponents and classmates alike—to say nothing of himself

**T**ED" ROCKINGHAM, captain of the Delaware College track team, and the fastest quarter-miler on the relay four of the gold and blue, gazed sympathetically across the oval.

Inside the cinder track his older brother, Victor, was making prodigious and futile efforts to hurl the sixteen-pound shot to within a creditable distance of the mark set by "Heavy" Stayton's muscular heave.

He was thinking hard, trying to find some event in which his brother might win his "D" before he graduated the next month, but in vain.

Too light for the weight events, lacking the necessary spring of the high jumper, or the strong shoulders of the pole vaulter, there seemed no place on the athletic program in which Victor could win his coveted letter.

With the last meet of his senior year

but a few days off, there did not appear to be any possible way for the reward to be won.

Ted had gone in for athletics from his freshman year at Delaware, easily making the various teams because of his natural aptitude for the work, and his intense loyalty to his college.

Victor, who had entered college the year before his brother, was inclined to be a "grind," and he had not made an appearance on the athletic field, but had corralled as many scholastic medals as Ted had won places in track meets.

His college being a Class B military institution, Victor had by dint of application won the proud position of first lieutenant in Company C, the medal company of the school.

This honor having been garnered in his senior year, he had finally awakened to the fact that his college course would

not be complete until he had won the right to wear his athletic letter on his breast, and he had trained for the purpose of winning it.

His appearance on the football field had been the signal for riotous mirth on the part of the husky pigskin chasers, and a few rushes had decided his chances in this sport of giants.

As Delaware College boasted a basketball five which tested the mettle of such worthy foemen as Penn; the Navy, and Rutgers, Victor was unable to win even his "DL" for scrub work in this department.

When spring came he chose the pastime of the lightly clad athletes in preference to baseball, with the result that Ted was even now pondering as he watched his brother fail at each event in turn.

"Vic!" he called across the oval; "stop playing with that cannon ball; you might drop it on your toes. Can you spare the time to come here for a few moments?"

His brother was accustomed to Ted's teasing manner, and he jogged across to him with the exaggerated stride of the novice sprinter.

Ted watched him with an amused smile, and beckoned to Penfield, another member of the relay four.

"Got the stop watch, Penfield?" he asked. "Thanks. I want to take Vic's time on the quarter. I have an idea that he can smash the world's record with about fifty years of training. My, doesn't he look nice in his pretty, clean suit and his spiked shoes!"

"Quit your fooling, Ted," laughed Victor. "If you are trying to expose me to the ridicule of the college, I refuse to run. In what capacity are you ordering me—brother, or track captain?"

"I am not teasing," said Ted, becoming serious; "I have a scheme which I want to try. Take a few laps to warm up with while I talk to Penfield. Off with you!"

In obedience to the track captain, Victor started to jog slowly around the almost deserted track, and Ted turned to his companion.

"Poor old Vic," he said, with brotherly affection. "He wants to win his letter so much! Now this is my plan, Penfield; you know that our relay team races the four from Muhlenburg College, and——"

"Muhlenburg!" interrupted Penfield. "Why, they are good at football, but I never thought much of their relay team."

"We had to hustle to find a four that would race us," explained Ted. "And Muhlenburg consented for the honor of running against the Delaware State champions. They have a few men in the other events, also, but the relay is the thing we must win. Now, three of our men can run so as to get such a lead on Muhlenburg that our fourth man, even though a poor runner, can't possibly lose it all before the tape is reached. Understand?"

"I understand," nodded Penfield, who saw the drift of Ted's remarks; "you are going to time Victor on the quarter and see if his record is anywhere near being decent. If so, he is to run on the relay and the other three men are to go so fast that they will secure a lead which will win him his 'D.' Who is to be the victim?"

"You," answered Ted bluntly. "See here, Penfield; you have won enough medals to make a belt of, you have gained your letter a dozen times over in every sport. There isn't any glory to be gained in defeating Muhlenburg this season; can't you step aside and let Victor win his letter? I wouldn't ask this of you, but you are the slowest on the team, and we can't take any unnecessary risk. How about it?"

"Ted," responded Penfield slowly, "you have appealed to me in the only way that could have reached me. I would like to see Victor win his letter, for he is a square fellow. For no one else would I do this, but if he runs his quarter in good time, I'll do it for his and your sake."

Ted had time to shake his teammate's hand fervently as Victor finished his warming up and strode up to them. The track captain ordered him on his mark a few moments later, and, at the



clap of his hands, intended to represent the crack of a starter's pistol, the senior shot away and rounded the first curve with a fair degree of speed.

Ted and Penfield watched him as he increased his pace down the back stretch, and to them he seemed to be running in good form. There appeared to be no definite reason why he could not run the quarter as fast as some of the relay men, but as he finished one lap and started into the half a lap which completed the quarter mile on the six-lap track, Ted saw that the watch would not record a record-breaking sprint.

"Fifty-four!" exclaimed Ted in disappointment, as his brother flung up his arms and broke an imaginary tape. "You are hardly winded; why didn't you clip a full second from that? Still, fifty-four will win against Muhlenburg, so get into trim to win your letter Saturday."

"I am to run on the relay!" gasped the amazed Victor. "Why, there isn't a man on our four who can't make it in less than fifty-three! What is the matter; have you lost a runner?"

Ted explained the plan to his brother, and Penfield agreed when the track captain told Victor how he was to win his letter.

The senior was profuse in his gratitude to Penfield for his generous action, and he enthusiastically complimented Ted on his clever scheme.

His athletic ambition was to be realized, and in addition to the scholastic and military honors he had won at Delaware, he would leave after having gained the crowning reward—his letter.

"I can't fail!" he exulted. "With Warwick, French, and you, Ted, to gain a big lead, I'll surely come in first. I have seen that Muhlenburg bunch run this season, and an ice wagon could give them a handicap and beat them to the tape. This is pretty generous of you, Penfield."

He left them in a few minutes, sprinting over to the gym for a shower and rubdown, and Ted looked at Penfield apologetically.

"You understand," he began. "That

kind of fellow isn't a bit of good to the team. They haven't a thought of winning glory for the blue and gold; all they consider is the individual distinction and the honor of having a 'D' on their jerseys.

"The fellow who makes the team a winner is the one who would willingly sacrifice everything, letter and all, for his college. If it had been any one else, Penfield, I would have told him to get off the track and dig for the Roberts medal, but—he is my brother."

"I know," answered Penfield embarrassedly. "That's why I am helping you."

Penfield had sized Victor Rockingham up pretty fairly when he said that he was a square fellow.

The senior was doing some serious thinking as he left the gym locker room and made his way slowly around to the broad stone steps leading up to the "Dorms," the residence of those students not having their abode at a "Frat" house.

He realized that he was not doing right, and that in his joy at knowing the letter could be won he had forgotten everything else for the time being, but now he began to consider the matter seriously.

He would not win his "D"; it would be won for him by his teammates, and not only would he work his college an injustice, but himself.

He looked at the broad steps, with the majestic columns of the porch, and the wide porticos; there was something stanch and upright in the appearance of the "Dorms," something emblematic of old Delaware's reputation for sportsmanship on the athletic field, and it helped him to win his bitter fight with himself.

It was hard to relinquish this last hope, but ten minutes later he surprised Ted and Penfield when he burst into the latter's room on "Poverty Row."

"I have decided not to take your offer, Ted," he told his brother. "I want to thank you, Penfield, for your kindness. I have thought the matter over, and it isn't the square thing to do.

The college offers the letter as a reward for athletic service rendered, and none but athletes who have trained and worked for their teams deserve it."

Ted would have spoken, but his brother continued:

"I, who for nearly four years have never appeared as a candidate for any team, have no right to win my 'D' by allowing three Delaware men to gain enough for me to defeat my man, while fellows who play on scrub teams day after day and help turn out crack first teams never get the reward. 'I'll come out Saturday to cheer for the team, but I can't wrong myself and my teammates."

Penfield held out his hand.

"Vic," he said earnestly, "I am glad to hear you say it. I would willingly have helped you to win your letter, but I did not like the idea of a fellow whom I have always regarded as being on the level winning it that way. I am sorry that you will not get it, but in the years to come you will be glad that you have decided this way."

"Right," agreed Ted seriously, "I didn't like the idea, either, but I knew how you wanted the letter. It would be like winning a medal for the best original oration after some one else had written it for you, Vic. The trouble is, you want the letter for yourself, and not for your college. Well, you have won enough honors in your time, so don't be greedy."

It was late that night when Penfield, bearing an evening paper, startled the Rockingham brothers by dashing excitedly into their room at the end of "Hungry Hall." Turning to the sporting page, he read:

"Martin, the phenomenal quarter-miler, late of Penn State College, has entered Muhlenburg College, and will run for that institution on the relay at the open meet to be held at Delaware College Saturday. The four will meet the Delaware team, State champions, and a lively race is expected."

"Isn't it a good thing that Victor decided to act squarely?" exclaimed Ted. "We would have been in a pretty fix if we had not seen this notice and he had

been in the race. We shall still have to win that big lead, for Martin is a remarkably fast man."

Saturday afternoon found Newark crowded with visiting track men, and the athletic field was the scene of the greatest activity.

Delaware had not entered men in any other event than the relay race with Muhlenburg, as the season was nearing the close and the students were preparing for the final examinations and exhibition drill at commencement.

Victor Rockingham was on hand to cheer his chums to victory, though in his heart was a deep regret that his last chance to win his letter was gone.

Penfield had not been seen since morning, as he and a friend from Rutgers had gone to dinner at a hotel in town. When it was time for the meet to start, Ted, dressed in his track suit, came from the gym and called to his brother.

Warwick and French, quarter-milers for Delaware, were pacing up and down anxiously beside the track.

"Have you seen Penfield?" demanded Ted. "Here it is nearly time for the race, and he hasn't shown up yet. I wonder what can have happened to him? Isn't this Penfield coming from the 'Dorms' now? Why, what——"

It was the delinquent Penfield—on crutches! He hobbled toward the dismayed athletes, who ran to meet him. One glance at his right ankle showed Ted that it was heavily bandaged.

"I slipped on those confounded 'Dorm' steps," he said, with a grimace of pain. "Victor will have to take my suit and do his best for old Delaware. Go in and win, old man; you can do it. Don't think of anything but that your college must win, and run your hardest. Everything depends on you, and for the sake of the gold and blue, don't fail us."

"We'll run him last," decided Ted, after a moment. "I still believe that we three can gain enough lead so that he won't lose. It isn't for your letter now, Vic; it's for old Delaware. French, you and Warwick run the races of your careers, and I will add what I can to your lead. Naturally, they will place Martin against me, as I am the fastest

of our team, and that will leave one of Muhlenburg's original slow coaches against Victor. I'll take pains to let them know I am running third, too."

He need not have bothered, for the Muhlenburg captain asked him point-blank in what place he intended to run, and Ted noticed with pleasure the look of gratification that crossed his face as the Delaware man let slip the desired information with studied carelessness, being careful to appear self-condemning a moment after he had done so.

"Thanks, awfully," grinned the Muhlenburg captain. "As host, you don't care to carry off the meet, but you'll have to go some to get the relay."

The relay race between Delaware and Muhlenburg came near the first of the program, as there were several more races which were expected would be more closely contested. French, the first runner for the gold and blue, knelt on his mark beside Webster, his rival.

Captain Rockingham urged him to run the race of his life, for there was a probability that Victor's presence on the team might endanger its chances of victory.

When French came down the home stretch at least thirty yards ahead of his man, all doubt as to Delaware's victory immediately left the minds of the students from that college. Warwick was touched on the outstretched hand as French finished pantingly, and he was off like a deer, to increase the lead as much as possible for Ted. If the Delaware captain could hold the speedy Martin to the loss of a few yards, Victor could be relied on to retain enough of Delaware's lead to win.

Ted stood waiting for his teammate to finish his half lap, smiling to himself as he saw his chum add twenty yards to Delaware's lead, then ten more, making the gold and blue sixty yards ahead when the third man was touched.

He was confident of at least holding Martin fairly evenly, and Vic could hardly lose fifty or more yards if he ran the quarter in fifty-four.

Ted leaned back to be touched by Warwick, and was soon speeding around the first curve, while the

Muhlenburg man danced feverishly on the line and waited for his teammate to finish.

It was Victor Rockingham's first race, and as he took his position he was conscious of a strange nervousness. Accustomed to the uneventful routine of classrooms and drills, this new experience was thrilling.

He felt a new pride in his college that had never come to him before, an intense desire to have her win the race, and all thoughts of his letter had deserted him.

So absorbed was he with his reflections that he almost forgot what he was doing, and he was brought to a realization of his duty by the frantic shouts of Penfield as the runners turned into the home stretch.

To his utter amazement, he saw that Ted's man had cut down the lead in a wonderful manner and was but ten yards behind the Delaware captain.

He made this up in the last hundred yards, and the two runners touched their men almost at the same instant, so that the final lap of the race found it practically starting all over again.

The Muhlenburg students were yelling madly, and Victor started in a dazed manner.

Suddenly the thought flashed on him that he had a chance to win his letter fairly and to make his college a winner.

It was the last relay of the race, and his man was abreast of him. If he succeeded in breaking the tape ahead of Muhlenburg, he alone would have won the race, for all the big lead gained by the first two men had been lost in an inexplicable manner.

He could not understand how even the fast Martin had eaten up the sixty yards on his brother, but the fact remained that this had been done.

He knew that all his college's hopes of victory depended on him, and all thoughts left him but the one that he must win. He put all his energy into a machinelike stride, and held his own with the Muhlenburg man.

Naturally a fast runner, but handicapped by lack of college spirit and desire for glory to his Alma Mater, Victor



Rockingham threw off in that hour of need his selfish motives for winning his letter, cast aside the lethargy which resulted from his years of confinement to study, and ran at the speed which would have been his all the time had he entered athletics in the right spirit and not for individual gain.

The incentive was there—the great need of his college for him to run his fastest and break the tape for Delaware.

But the Muhlenburg man was also a loyal athlete, and he had no intention of allowing Rockingham to beat him. He was running a superb race, and as the two turned the last curve and swept into the home stretch, lined on each side with yelling spectators, he began a magnificent spurt, and Victor saw the Muhlenburg jersey flash ahead of him.

Far down the stretch the ribbonlike tape invited him, and beyond it was Ted, shouting and waving his arms excitedly. All this he saw subconsciously; he had no thought but that for his college he must break the tape.

Inch by inch, each gain won by a superhuman effort, he drew up on the flying Muhlenburg athlete, and fifty yards from the tape he heard Ted shout something that made him fairly leap with amazement.

He found that he still had a degree of reserve energy, and he flung it all into one last mad sprint that brought him shoulder to shoulder with his man.

The yelling ceased as by magic; there was something awe-inspiring in this magnificent battle on the track, and it was fought in silence.

But Victor Rockingham possessed what his rival lacked, a sudden awakening to the glorious joy of winning for one's college, of putting his team across the tape to victory.

With the realization of the true athlete's ambition in winning athletic contests—that of glory and honor to his college, there came an exuberant strength.

Faded were all selfish aims and purposes of personal gain; all lost in the one grand determination to win the race for Delaware.

He threw himself ahead of the Muhlenburg runner in a final outburst of energy, and a second later the tape brushed across his breast.

He ran into his brother's arms, and Ted kept him from falling exhausted to the track. The captain of the Delaware team was strangely pale, but he was wildly happy.

"Vic!" he whispered joyously. "Do you know what you have done? You have defeated Martin, the crack quarter-miler! Your record was fifty-one flat!"

"How came I to run against Martin?" stammered the bewildered runner.

"Muhlenburg thought to trick us," explained Ted, "by putting him last to run against you when they knew we expected him to race me. They heard of our losing Penfield. We beat them at their own game."

"I beat him!" repeated Victor in wonder. "But, Ted, how came your man to make up all the lead you had? He must have been one of the slow ones, if Martin ran last."

"My heart went back on me," answered Ted sorrowfully. "And I had to finish my quarter on my nerve. It was agony to have him crawl up on me with you waiting at the line, and that helped me to keep on. But for my heart you would have won with ease, though it is better as it is."

Looking up, Victor was given a second surprise, for Penfield was dancing up and down as though he were crazy, waving his crutches in air. In a second Ted had seized his hand and was dragging him over to his brother. Penfield shook Victor's hand enthusiastically and continued his wild actions.

"Penfield!" shouted Ted. "What has happened to you? Did the race cure your ankle so quickly? What makes you so happy?"

"It was all a fake," explained Penfield. "I said I slipped on the 'Dorm' steps, which was true, but you imagined I hurt my ankle, which was wrong."

"But why did you deceive us?" demanded Ted. "We needed you badly."

"I wanted Vic to win his letter and to deserve it," said Penfield more calmly. "And I did this to make him run. I talked with the coach, and he agreed with me that Victor was naturally a fast quarter-miler, but that he had wrong motives, and he lacked the necessary incentives to his best work."

"What was your idea?" interposed Victor.

"I was sure that if the responsibility rested on him he would forget all about himself and run for his college," continued Penfield. "For he is that kind of a fellow at heart. He studied so long that he never knew how an athlete who loves his college can lose himself for her sake."

"You did this to make me run?" exclaimed Victor, "because you believed in me?"

"When you, Ted, lost all that had been gained," finished Penfield, "I was glad, for I felt Victor would realize things in a clear light and run his best, which was good enough to win ordinarily. But I was scared when I learned they had switched Martin to

run last. It was a splendid race, old man, and you have earned your letter thoroughly."

"He saved the day for Delaware," asserted Ted proudly.

"But, better than all," rejoined his teammate, "he will leave Delaware with the knowledge that he has served her on the athletic field as well as in the classroom and on the parade ground, and that he is in every way worthy of the letter she is proud to award him."

Then, for the first time, Victor Rockingham understood that by winning the race for his college he had brought himself the reward which he had so lately coveted for personal reasons. With a surprised look, he gazed at his brother.

"Why, I have won my 'D,' haven't I?" he asked wonderingly; "I have won my letter!"

Ted grasped his hand with a happy laugh.

"You are all right at last," he said. "You have the right spirit, Vic, when you can forget all about your letter and think only of having won for old Delaware."

## Hero of the Austrian Tyrol

NO one who visits Switzerland—at all events, the beauty spot of Lake Lucerne—can fail to see and hear a good deal about the patriot, William Tell, and those who visit the Austrian Tyrol will find that the place which Tell holds in Swiss history is there held by Andreas Hofer.

But, whereas much of the story of William Tell is more likely to be legend than fact, that of Hofer is fact all through. He died a hundred years ago.

The story belongs to the wars of Napoleon. When the armies of that mighty man swept eastward over Europe, the Tyrol was conquered and united to Bavaria. This union found no favor with the sturdy mountaineers of the former country, and in 1809, led by Andreas Hofer, an innkeeper, they rose in revolt, and drove the Bavarians out of their pleasant valleys.

They even defeated several detachments of French troops, and the name of Hofer became as bright a beacon in those troubled days to the freedom-loving peasantry as was that of Washington to our forefathers.

But again, after a lull, French and Bavarians poured into the Tyrol, and this time the army of occupation was too strong to resist. Hofer had to disband his little forces, and sought refuge in the more inaccessible parts of his native mountains. Two months later he was betrayed to the enemy. Captured and carried to Mantua, he was tried by court-martial, and on the 20th of February, 1810, the great-hearted leader was shot.

Nine years later the reigning emperor of Austria paid honor to the heroism and self-sacrifice of the dead patriot by ennobling his family, and in 1834 a statue was erected to his memory in the city of Innsbruck.

# How to Be Healthy

By Prof. Fairfax

DON'T enlist among the wabbling chaps who sneer at Cagy Ben's maxim: "Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise."

Join the go-ahead fellows who not only believe that Cagy Ben was in right, but who are enterprising and energetic enough to put that belief into practice.

If you are healthy you can't help being wealthy—in power to dare and to do.

"All through life," says Horace Mann, "a feeble-bodied man's path is lined with memory's gravestones, which mark the spot where noble enterprises perished for lack of physical vigor to embody them in deeds."

With health you're bound to have true wealth, and you can't possess those two without being wise.

The best medicine you can take every day is a good dose of fresh air and sunshine.

An excellent use to make of a window in a sleeping room is to throw it wide open.

Let in the fresh air whenever and wherever you can. You can't get too much fresh air.

If the air seems cold, then breathe deeper, put on more clothes, but let it in. Don't be afraid of it.

Treat fresh air as your good friend. It certainly means nothing but good to you. So up with the windows.

Another friend you should take to your heart is sunshine. You can't have too much of its company.

Shut up a dog in a dark cellar, and he will die in six months of consumption.

Work if you possibly can in a room that gets the direct rays of the sun. If your work compels you to remain in a sunless room for a while, seize every opportunity to be out in the sunshine.

Walk out in the sunshine on every possible occasion; exercise, breathe deep, breathe long, play, eat, take a nap, do anything and everything you can out in the sunshine, and you will be that much nearer perfect health.

Let the sun shine on your soul as well as your body. That means you should buck up when discouraged, laugh when you feel like complaining, march forward when you are inclined to halt or fall back. Don't doubt the sunshine. It is bound to come if you only give it an invitation.

But, whatever you do, however you feel, wherever or however you go, never forget or fail to act in accord with the maxim of Cagy Ben.



# Men and Treasure

By R. Keene Thompson

Has the genius of authorship rung its last change on the story of men hunting for treasure? Perhaps. But how about the treasure that hunts the men? And a ship, sailing on the wind's caprice, unguided by human hands, fairly combing the seas in search of a claimant for her precious cargo? In this tale—weird, puzzling, delightful, dreadful at moments, but amusing and always powerful—Mr. Thompson has worked out with marked cleverness a decidedly novel idea. It's the sort of a yarn that gives you the glad grip and holds it all the way.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE CASTAWAYS.

"IT'S no use!" said Timothy L. Hawkins, of Boston, as he took his weary gaze from the sea. "We may as well give up hope."

He turned toward his companions under the coconut trees—the professor of metallurgy at Harvard, a stoker off the wrecked twin-screw steamer *Fernandez*, and one young man.

"This is what you've let me in for!" he snapped at the latter. "This is what I get for listening to you and your yarn of a buried treasure. I start out with you for South America, and I'm shipwrecked before I get there!"

The young man continued to scan the horizon, unmoved.

"That's no fault of mine," he said. "To the best of my ability, I agreed to take you and Professor Hoxley to Peru, and show you what I stumbled on while bridge building down there last winter. Despite this disaster, I can still make that agreement good."

"You can't!" snarled the financier. "You can't because you never had anything to show. I may as well tell you now as any other time, I suppose. I knew all along your tale was only hot air!"

Slowly Alec Brood looked around.

"If you didn't believe what I told you," he said, perplexed, "why did you set out with me?"

"I'll tell you why!" replied Hawkins,

his lip curling. "It's always been the easiest trick in the bag to advertise shares for sale in a treasure-seeking expedition and have the public fall over itself to hand in its money. I was going to use your story to bunko a few suckers with.

"Because I wanted the proper local color for my ads," he continued, "I was going to Peru with you. And I brought along the professor here, not to have his expert opinion on the gold and silver and gems you claimed you could lead me to, but for the advertising value of his name. Buried treasure! Buried pipe dreams! Do I look like a come-on?" he laughed harshly. "If you think you took me in with your fairy tale, you're mistaken. I meant business!"

He looked past the beach, with its little bay of blue waves laughing in the sun, at the empty ocean beyond.

"And now see where I am!" he cried bitterly. "Cooped up on this jungle strip in the middle of Nowhere, a prisoner. Cut off from friends, family, everything. What a bonehead I was ever to leave home at all!"

The civil engineer leaned forward.

"I don't think you'll regret starting out with me, Hawkins," he said, with quiet scorn. "I believe I can show you that you'd have been a bigger fool than any of the suckers you meant to bunko, if you had sold anybody a share in the treasure I offered to go halves with you on. Laugh if you like, but there is a

treasure. And I'm going to take you to the exact location, and make your eyes bulge with the proof of it, when we get away from here!"

"When we get away!" The capitalist laughed again. "The sooner we make up our minds that we're never going to be found, the better. Yesterday was the twenty-eighth since the vessel sank, and still no sail's in sight. We're doomed to stay here for the rest of our days. All our signal fires and shirt waving from the hill behind us is just so much effort thrown away!"

He looked over his shoulder at the thicket of trees and shrubs that revealed the little party's source of vegetarian food supply and concealed yet another of their number. Somewhere in the heart of the copse was a promontory that overlooked the surrounding sea; and on this elevation was Archie Vaine, the *Comet's* big-feature man.

Hearing in Boston that the famous financier was starting for San Francisco, he had followed, and seen Hawkins and his companions book passage for South America. His news instinct aroused, the reporter had tagged along—till the steamer foundered, throwing him with the millionaire, scientist, and civil engineer, plus the red-shirted stoker, the sole survivors of the wreck, on this island.

"I'm almost glad," Hawkins sneered, "that the ship went to pieces. It's put that long-nosed puppy where he won't get in touch with the yellow sheet that hires him for one long while!"

In the jungle strip a commotion began. Monkeys chattered, squealed, and shrieked. Wings flapped in the frightened flight of birds. A far-off crackle of underbrush arose, quick footsteps beat the earth, and sounds of shouting grew nearer and nearer.

Out of the thicket a figure dashed—the figure of a young man, long-nosed, indeed, and with a pair of eyeglasses flying at the end of a cord that stood out straight behind him.

Leaping and bounding toward them, the reporter flung up his arms, and uttered the electrifying cry:

"Sail, ho!"

## CHAPTER II.

### THE HELP THAT CAME.

All looked out to sea.

There was nothing there.

Brood whirled on the reporter.

"What's this," he demanded; "some dismal joke of yours?"

Vaine advanced, panting.

"For the love of Mike," he said, "do you think I'd jest about a thing like this? I tell you, there's a ship running toward the island. I saw her, not three minutes ago, from the hill with my own two eyes. You can't see her yet, because that arm of the bay shuts her out. There!"

He pointed behind the others.

"Look! look!" he cried. "Here she comes!"

As one, the three castaways turned. Just showing above the treetops on a jut of land to the east were the masts of a vessel, sure enough. Slowly they crept along. And then, with all sail set, the ship rounded into full view, a dazzling bulk of white against the blue of the sky.

A sort of choking awe gripped the onlookers as they watched the craft keel gracefully in the off-sea breeze and turn her bows toward them.

On she came, as though intending to sail right over the island; but in the middle of the little bay she suddenly swung up into the wind, and, with flapping sails, was quite motionless.

"Jove!" cried Brood enthusiastically; "that chap is some sailor."

Then, as the vessel rode at anchor—apparently—in the shelter of the tiny cove, they cheered, shouted, caught hands, and capered round the beach, almost mad with joy.

But gradually their exuberance died away. They stopped their frenzied dance, ceased their glad cheering, and fell silent; for from the ship had come no hail, no answering cheers.

She lay there silent, motionless, save for the gentle flapping of her canvas. She might have been a phantom ship for all signs of life that appeared; and Brood unconsciously rubbed his eyes, more than half convinced she was only

a creature of his imagination or a mirage.

Moving toward the edge of the bay, they shouted themselves hoarse in an attempt to stir from her some response—in vain.

"What's the matter?" asked Hawkins, turning anxiously to the civil engineer.

Brood, shading his eyes, looked at the silent craft, and shook his head.

"I don't understand," he muttered. Impulsively he started away down the beach at a brisk jog trot.

"He's going to swim out!" The professor clutched Hawkins' arm. "Is it safe to risk——"

"Good boy!" The millionaire shook off the scientist's hand as he watched the young man wade out to his waist and launch himself full length in the bay. "We'll soon find out what's wrong now."

Swiftly Brood approached the motionless ship. Now his head was but a bobbing dot on the waves to the watchers on shore. They saw him reach the vessel and disappear around its bow. A wait—and now he reappeared on the ship's deck.

Hawkins checked a cheer from Vaine and the stoker in mid-utterance.

"Shut up!" he ordered. "He's calling something. Listen!"

Leaning against the rail, his hands cupped to his mouth, Brood shouted to them words that floated over the intervening water unintelligibly. The distance was too great. Seeing that they did not understand, he began gesticulating frantically, hanging over the rail at a reckless angle.

Then, as it was plain that whatever he wanted to convey to the watching group was lost on them, the man on board the ship gave up his waving and shouting and vaulted the rail, plunging back into the bay.

Rapidly he swam inshore.

"If you idiots ever expect to get away from here," he bawled when he could touch bottom, "swim, as you never swam before, to that ship!"

Reegan, already at the water's edge, floundered out to his hips, and flung

himself paddling madly, toward the neck of the cove. Vaine and the professor raced down the beach and started swimming after.

"Why don't they send a boat?" Hawkins shouted. "This is a blanked fine rescue, I must say! Can't we be taken off decently and in the regular way?"

"There's no boat to send!" Brood roared. "Come on—don't stand there talking!"

Grumbling, the financier ran down the beach, and splashed in. Side by side with him, the engineer swam back to the vessel. They reached the craft at the same time as the others.

Leading the way around the starboard bow, Brood revealed the means by which he had previously gained the deck—a rope-end, trailing in the seaweed-laden water that lapped the hull, securely knotted to the rail above.

Up this he ordered Hoxley, well-nigh spent from the exertion. He himself followed closely. At his heels came Reegan, the stoker; next Hawkins—making hard work of the hand-over-hand climb—and, last of all, the reporter, Archie Vaine.

Dripping, exhausted, they dropped, one by one, over the rail, and lay, panting and still, on deck.

"Why——" Hawkins, the first to regain speech, had risen to his knees and was staring about him. "Why, where's everybody?"

Brood propped himself on one elbow.

"I thought you knew before," he said wearily. "There's nobody but us on board this boat, and hasn't been for days!"

There was a ghastly silence.

From the canvas overhead came a series of crackling reports. By some perversity of wind, the sails filled just at that instant. With a creak and groaning of masts and rigging, the bows swung around in the mouth of the bay. There was a gurgling rush of water along the hull, and, quite as handily as though there had been a man at the helm and a full crew aboard, the ship headed out to the open sea!



## CHAPTER III.

## A HELPLESS PLIGHT.

Vaine laughed; but there was no mirth in it.

"Out of the frying pan into the fire!" he said. "Rescued by a derelict!"

Nobody spoke. Reegan, Hoxley, and the millionaire were stunned into open-mouthed, glassy-eyed speechlessness. Brood had collapsed, out of breath. So, for some moments, there were no sounds but those of the ship in motion—bowling along in the stiff wind that blew outside the cove.

Then Hawkins scrambled to his feet and bounded to the rail, looking back toward the island.

"Could you jump now, this minute, and make it?" Vaine asked. "If you think you can stand the swim, this is your chance to get your feet on solid land once more—your last chance. Every second we're going farther out—toward our certain finish!"

The financier was measuring the rapidly widening distance to the island with doubtful eyes. Brood sat up.

"Why," he panted, "why do you say that? 'Our finish.' Even if the ship is deserted, aren't we safe on board?"

"Safe?" The reporter stared at him. "Man, look about you. All sail set, rigging taut, ropes coiled everywhere, as in mid-voyage. Do you think this vessel broke mooring and drifted to us out of some port? She's been abandoned on the high seas because she's *aleak*. That's why the boat's gone with the crew and captain. You ask if we're safe? Yes, every puff of wind is bearing us out to sea to drown like rats in a trap, that's all!"

Sighing, Brood rose and walked to the empty davits.

"Here are the scrapes of the missing boat," he said. "You'll notice they're not fresh, but weather-stained. I said there'd been nobody on board for days. This proves it. If the ship was ready to sink when the crew and all left, why is she still afloat?"

Hawkins wheeled from the rail.

"You're right, by Jove!" he exclaimed. "The ship's stanch! What

difference does it make to us if she's deserted? We're five able-bodied men, and we're fools if we can't turn to and run the vessel into safe harbor ourselves. Look alive! The first thing to do—the first thing——"

Vaine wore a cynical smile.

"Er—we must first," the millionaire began again.

"Exactly!" said the reporter. "You don't know the first thing about manning a ship this size any more than I do. Brood, are you a seaman? I thought not. Professor, does your learning embrace even a rudimentary knowledge of things maritime? Thank you, I didn't suppose it would. And you, Reegan, can you sail ship for us?"

The stoker shook his bullet head.

"I've been heavin' coal, off an' on, fer twenty year," he growled; "but to tell you one end o' a wessel from another—that I couldn't do, if 'twas to save me hangin'!"

"You see?" Vaine turned to Hawkins. "Five able-bodied men we may be; but, when it comes to sailing this vessel, we're all as helpless as babes!"

The capitalist was choked with wrath.

"Do we have to show diplomas from a correspondence school of seamanship," he bellowed, "before we can take hold and help ourselves out of this mess? Say, we're all landlubbers. One of us, at any rate, has got the common horse sense to take the wheel and turn around——"

"Hold on!" The reporter caught Hawkins' arm as he started toward the stern. "Don't try to put back to the island. And don't go monkeying with the steering apparatus at all. If you should turn in this howling wind, do you know what would happen? Maybe Brood's right, and the ship's seaworthy. You come about, with none of us able to trim sail, out'll come her masts and we *shall* sink!"

With almost a sob, Hawkins drew back.

"Then what the dickens are we going to do?" he asked shakily. "Nothing? Just sail on and on, or drift round in circles, getting nowhere?"

Vaine's brow wrinkled.

"I suggest that the best thing to be done is to wait till we come in sight of some other ship," he said; "and when we do, jump from this craft and swim to the other."

Brood stared moodily across the barren waters.

"Like as not we'll keep out of sight of any vessel," he said, "for days, weeks—till we starve."

He looked at the others.

"Food," he added meaningly. "Who's thought of that?"

Professor Hoxley nodded.

"I have," he said. "On the island we were plentifully supplied by nature with a variety of nutritive vegetation. Now that supply has been cut off, it can make but little difference to us whether the ship sinks or what it does, unless we find provisions on board. We ought to settle that question first; and the way to do it is to search the vessel."

"Come on," said Brood.

Followed by the others, he skirted the foremast and dropped down the nearest hatchway.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE SECRET OF THE CABIN.

Plunging out of the dazzling sunlight into the dusk of the ship's interior made a delay of several seconds necessary before the eyes of the little party of exploration could become accustomed to the gloom and take in their surroundings.

Then they found themselves in the deserted forecabin.

Here was a scene of wildest confusion. Yawning at them out of the shadows were the blacker apertures of the empty bunks, from not a few of which the scant bedding hung in disorder. Boots, oilskins, cast-off clothing, and the like littered the floor. Sea chests had been pulled out, lids flung back, and the contents rifled by careless hands.

The evidence was plain that the crew must have gone from the vessel hurriedly; indeed, in a very panic of flight to leave their quarters looking as though a cyclone had swept the cramped compartment.

But why had they gone? Below, there was no more signs of a ship in distress than had been noticeable on deck. The vessel rode the sea on a level keel, skimming the waves as buoyantly as a bird on the wing. Every minute Brood's conjecture was beginning to look more plausible—that the ship was stanch.

Yet ships that are stanch are not usually deserted on the high seas by sailors and their officers. A caprice does not cause every soul on board a vessel to abandon it in mid-ocean, leaving a perfectly sound, seaworthy craft, with every sail, rope, and minutiae of rigging in its place, to the mercy of wind and wave.

Could it be that this vessel *was* leaking when it was deserted; but, after everybody had gone, some natural cause remedied the damage, and thus kept the craft afloat till it reached the castaways on the island?

Drifting seaweed—had a mass of that been wedged into the stove hull, plugging the hole effectually? It was a slender theory at best, but one that might repay looking into later on.

Just now the party, coming out of the forecabin, were on a hunt for food. Moving down a narrow passage they came upon their goal. Food, sacked, crated, boxed, barreled, and tinned—enough to outlast twice their number for many months to come—was here. With the hunger of men long sustained on an enforced vegetable diet, Reagan and the millionaire attacked the canned meat voraciously.

Vaine, standing in the doorway with the others, looked about him with the unconquerable fire of the dyed-in-the-wool news gatherer shining in his eyes. He marked a neatness here that was in striking contrast to the confusion of the forecabin; and a puzzled crease furrowed his forehead.

How was this? The first thing of which men abandoning a ship by the lifeboat would think would be food. Judging from the tumbled state of the crew's quarters, the men who had left this vessel had done so with frantic haste. Did it not stand to reason, then,

that if they had foraged for provender before their flight they would have left the storeroom in something of the disorder that reigned in the evacuated forecabin?

Unless the crew had not stopped for food. Could that be possible? Had the men deserted the vessel for a reason so urgent that they chose to face days in an open boat without food rather than linger long enough to gather provisions? Brood was walking away in the direction of the cabin.

With the professor, Vaine followed, the thoughtful wrinkle on his brow by no means lessened. Bringing up the rear, audibly filling their mouths from the tins each carried, came the stoker and Hawkins.

The engineer, on the threshold of the cabin, halted with an exclamation. His half-suppressed cry brought the others crowding to his heels. And, looking over his shoulder, an echo of his gasp came from them all.

In the center of the room, at a long, pine table, to which was tacked some sort of a map, sat an undersized, red-haired man in his shirt sleeves.

His head was bent. He appeared to be absorbed in the chart before him. So intent upon it, in fact, that he was not aware of the peering figures that filled the doorway, for he gave no sign that he sensed their presence.

A cap lay on the table next his elbow. Lettered in faded gold threads above the broken visor was the still-decipherable word "captain." At sight of this, Hawkins, with an impatient click of the tongue, pushed the others away and strode blusteringly into the cabin.

Still the man did not move. Crossing to his side, the financier halted not a step away. Even then the shirt-sleeved figure did not look up.

Hawkins laid hold of his shoulder, and recoiled as though at contact with a live wire. Limply the man sagged sideways in his chair. His head rolled back; and staring at those on the threshold was the explanation of his preoccupied attitude.

A smooth, black hole, drilled by a bullet, in the center of his brow!

## CHAPTER V.

### A MYSTERY.

Clattering, the half-emptied can of beef dropped from Hawkins' hands to the floor, where it rolled, zigzagging under the table, and came to a stop against the dead man's foot.

"Murdered!" he whispered.

Just then rang out from the captain's chronometer four bells, breaking the brittle silence. The sharp "ding-dong, ding-dong!" chimed with the same thought in every mind:

"Mur-dered! mur-dered!"

The four men in the doorway stepped across the sill into the cabin and ranged themselves beside the millionaire, looking at the gruesome figure their exploration had revealed. Undoubtedly they gazed upon the victim of a crime. No need to suspect anything else under the circumstances—a dead man on board an abandoned vessel, bored through the head with a pistol bullet!

"Perhaps this is a clew," Brood whispered in the reporter's ear. "Maybe this explains the ship's abandonment."

Vaine raised his eyebrows.

"Why?" he asked.

The engineer nodded toward the cap on the table. "This is the skipper, plain enough," he replied. "Shot down in his cabin as he sat poring over his chart. Killed for what reason?"

The reporter surveyed Brood steadily.

"I don't know," he said.

"Doesn't the one word come into your mind?" the other asked. "'Mutiny'?"

His eyes snapped.

"Figure it out yourself: Here we find the captain of this vessel shot. The vessel itself is adrift, without a living soul on board. How do you miss seeing a connecting link between those two things—you, a professional putter of two and two together? It's perfectly plain to me. The crew rose up against the captain on some point or other, and one of their number did for him. Then, to avoid the penalty of their crime, the crew, naturally, took to the boats and escaped!"



Vaine shook his head.

"Bum deduction," he said. "If the crew put the skipper out of the way, as you say, all they'd need to do would be to sew him up in a bag, heave him overboard, write up the log that on such and such a day the captain died of natural causes, and go on, as if nothing had happened, for the rest of their voyage."

Brood frowned.

"But the crew's gone," he said.

"Precisely," said Vaine.

"I——" The engineer faced the newspaper man squarely. "What do you make of this whole thing?" he blurted.

The reporter rubbed the knuckles of one hand with the palm of the other. It was a way he had when "thinking thunks," as he called meditation.

"I'll tell you," he said slowly. "I don't like it. There's some mystery that I don't see yet. You noticed, I suppose, the state of the forecastle? When the men got off this craft, they got off in a hurry. Something drove them off, it's my opinion, that wasn't a leak or a murdered captain. And that"—he looked down at the corpse across the table—"is another funny thing!"

"Let's you and me," said Brood, "look into that seaweed idea right now. If there was a leak, and it's been plugged up since the ship was deserted, we ought to be able to discover it."

The two young men started out of the cabin. Hawkins, seeing them about to slip away, called loudly to know where they were going. When he was told, he wanted to go along. The professor and Reegan evidently had no desire to stay alone with the red-headed, dead man, either. So they all trooped out and set forth in a body to make a thorough investigation of the vessel.

Thorough their search was, but no trace that there was a leak, or ever had been one on that ship, came to light. On the way back to the cabin, an hour later, Vaine carried two foot-long blocks of blackened metal which he had picked up in the dark hold. Reegan was similarly laden, at the reporter's order. These bars of heavy junk were

the sole fruits of the expedition to the bowls of the boat.

"What're you lugging those bricks for?" Brood asked.

"To use," Vaine replied curtly. "Step into the galley here and pick up what loose sacks you can lay hands on, will you? Then come along to the cabin."

Something had to be done with the body they had found on this sound and seaworthy derelict. The reporter had it in mind to give what decent burial the sea afforded to the unfortunate whom chance had led them to stumble on.

From the sacks which Brood brought out of the galley a cloth coffin was constructed, by the aid of sail thread and needle found in an opened sea chest in the forecastle. Weighted with the metal blocks which Vaine had brought for the purpose, and enveloping the corpse snugly, this homely casket was borne up the ladder and laid on deck.

From memory Vaine recited what he could of a simple service. Then, in silence, the body was hoisted to the rail, poised a moment, and let slide over the side.

Just as sunset turned the sky glorious with color, the waves opened and closed to mark in the passing of a second the last resting place of the ship's captain.

And that spot on the water, now rapidly drifting astern, where the improvised coffin had sunk—did it not mark the eternal abode of the answer to the question each man on the unguided craft felt gnawing at his heart: the reason for the vessel's desertion?

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE BLACK BAR.

Brood broke the thoughtful silence that hung upon the party on deck, still facing toward the point on the ocean's heaving expanse where the burial had taken place.

"Well," he said, "night's coming on!"

Vaine turned from the rail.

"That's true," he said. "We'd better be finding whatever lamps or lanterns there are on board and getting them lighted. I don't want to run across any

more unpleasant surprises in pitch darkness!"

"I was going to say," the engineer began.

"Hist!" The reporter beckoned him out of earshot of the others. "I've just thought of something. Funny it didn't strike me before. This—what cargo is the ship carrying?"

Brood stared at him. "Cargo?" he repeated. "How should I know?"

"You shouldn't," Vaine remarked. "But you might think a minute about what that idea suggests. If it suggests anything to you?"

"It doesn't."

"Um! It dawns on me that a ship this size could carry almost anything. From a consignment of caged beasts for the circus and menagerie business to—but I see you catch my drift now. Yes, what if this ship's cargo should be wild animals—lions, tigers, and the like? Some of them may have got loose and caused the crew to duck—a prowling leopard or two may be roaming the under deck now—"

"That's preposterous!" Brood scoffed. "Wouldn't we have had some indication of it before now if that was the case? Remember, we've pretty thoroughly overhauled the ship. I haven't seen anything on four legs prowling about yet, nor anything that looks like a cage, and neither have you. This is a little attempt at humor, isn't it?"

Vaine was rubbing his knuckles.

"No," he said. "I'm serious. Cut out the wild-animal part; that was the first thing that popped into my head, and I guess there's nothing in it. But the cargo—whatever it is, I'll take a dying chance and bet a hat it's *that* that caused the sailors to fly the coop!"

"And murder the captain?"

"Yes," the reporter mused, "that, too, for all I know. Look here. You're as sure as I am that it wasn't any leak that drove everybody off before we came along, aren't you? Believe me, the shooting up of the skipper didn't provoke the exodus, either. Then what did send every man jack helter-skelter off the craft as though the devil was at his heels?"

"The cargo, that's what. You mark my words, you'll find there's something funny about it before long. I don't know what, but—here, listen. Once I read in some book or other of a vessel loaded with chemical substance that was almighty valuable, but had the unfortunate trick of drawing all the nails out of the boat. That was fiction, you understand. They say fact is stranger; but *we'll* say, for the sake of argument, that fact and fiction run neck and neck.

"Now, what's to hinder this ship being freighted with some sort of stuff that will cause her to sink after a while? The crew, we'll suppose, finds out about it, tells the captain he's got to throw the whole business overboard, shoots him when he refuses, and deserts in a body through sheer fright—"

"Oh, that's enough!" Brood checked him. "Who wants to listen to such idiotic theories at a time like this? Not I."

He moved away.

"As I started to say, night is almost at hand. We ought to be doing something to get off this ship. Night offers us the best chance of being seen by another vessel. Rockets—every boat has a stock of them, I'm sure. Let's scour the ship for all the Roman candles, torches, and skyrockets we can find, and set 'em off at regular intervals when there's a dark enough background."

"Great!" cried Hawkins, starting for the companionway.

His descent was blocked by Professor Hoxley, hurrying up the ladder just then, agitated by some peculiar excitement which caused his eyes to glisten and his breath to whistle through his teeth.

"Mr. Vaine!" he cried, bustling forward. "Mr. Vaine—where did you get this?"

He held out, by a severe muscular effort, one of the blackened bars that the reporter and Reagan had carried up from the hold.

"Down below," said Vaine indifferently. "Why, what's the matter?"

The scientist was actually trembling. "Whereabouts 'down below'?" he persisted.

"In the hold, among the cargo."

"The cargo!" Hoxley laid the brick on deck and mopped his face with a crooked elbow. "The—there were more of these where you found this?"

The reporter laughed shortly.

"About a thousand or two," he said.

"Why—Professor—Cæsar's ghost!"

He flashed a look at Brood, then stepped toward Hoxley.

"I get you!" he said abruptly. "These innocent-looking bricks—they're not quite so innocent as they look; are they, eh?"

"No," said Hoxley, "they are not!"

Triumphant now, Vaine looked the engineer in the eye, and smiled a superior smile.

"You're a metallurgist, sir," he addressed the professor, "and you can tell us just what those black bars are. Can't you?"

"I can."

"And the name is——"

The scientist bit his lips to stop their quavering.

"The name," said he, "with which you are all more or less familiar, is solid gold!"

## CHAPTER VII.

### QUEER CARGO.

As if paralyzed by the professor's announcement, they all stood staring at him in dazed silence.

Then Hawkins walked forward and kicked the brick of metal on the deck dubiously.

"You mean to say," he snapped at the professor, "that this stuff is—is gold?"

Feverishly Hoxley's hand dove in his pocket.

"I'll show you!" he said, laughing tremulously. "You'll see!"

Pulling out a penknife, he fell on his knees over the bar. The steel flashed and bit into the surface of the oblong. Layer after layer of black verdigris peeled off. And there lay an inch-square surface of yellow, the yellow of ripe oranges, pure sunshine, gold!

"There, sir!" The professor sliced out a piece from the heart of the shining patch and presented it to Hawkins

on the knife blade. "There—that's worth just about ten dollars. Only that much. You saw how soft it was? That's because it's pure—without alloy—the most wonderful, wonderful gold I have ever seen—ever handled!"

He rattled on like a babbling child.

"This is rare—old—more than antique. I should say that it came from some storehouse of the Aztecs, perhaps. Surely it was modeled into this form by some race of people long forgotten. Pure, pure gold! From the South—yes, unmistakably from some rich vein in southern territory—perhaps in South America——"

Hawkins was turning the morsel of metal over and over in his pudgy fingers, eying it gloatingly.

"And to think," he snarled, glowering up suddenly at Vaine, "that you threw three bars of this overboard with that bag of lifeless flesh not fifteen minutes ago! Thousands of dollars gone to the bottom of the ocean!"

"There's plenty more," the reporter said brusquely, "where those came from."

"You're sure?" the financier asked eagerly. "You're positive—there's as many bars as you said in the hold? Surely?"

"Thousands of 'em," Vaine answered laconically.

Brood touched his arm.

"And why," he said, with a nod toward the black brick over which Hoxley was still bending, "do you think the ship was deserted *now*?"

The reporter said nothing. But he rubbed his knuckles frantically with the palms of both hands.

Up the companionway behind them came Reegan, staggering with the weight of a square, peculiar-shaped box in his arms. The stoker had gone below as soon as the professor cleared the companion ladder, bent on finding the rockets to which Brood had referred.

Lumbering forward, the heavy case against his brawny chest, the man called out:

"Here y' are, boss!"

The engineer looked around.

And as he did so his face turned



suddenly from bronze to ash gray. His mouth opened. His eyes seemed popping from his head as they fastened on the queer casket that the stoker laboriously lugged with him.

He took a step toward him.

"Where—where did you get that?" he asked, in a strained voice.

Reegan, at sight of his face, stopped.

"Down below," he answered, as Vaine had done before. "It's—it's the Roaming candles and the skyrollickers you was askin' fer, boss. Leastways, I guess that's what's in——"

Brood had never ceased staring at the box in the stoker's arms. Made of some odd wood, curiously carved and fitted with hinges and trimmings of strange design and workmanship, it appeared to fascinate him. Now he raised his arm slowly, with tense purpose in the gesture, and leveled a finger at Reegan.

"Put that down!" he said distinctly.

All too literally and with overzealous promptness the stoker obeyed him. Startled by the look on the young man's countenance, as well as amazed at his menacing manner, he let the case slip from his hold.

Crashing, the thing fell to the deck. The force of impact proved too much for the old wood and quaint hinges. Simultaneously with the thud of the box, as it hit the boards below, sounded a crunch and splintering, a rending and ripping——

And out of the sprung sides of the casket ran a widening stream of flashing, sparkling, unset jewels!

Dozens, hundreds, thousands of them, rubies, sapphires, emeralds, glinting, gleaming, gorgeous, they ran in a never-ending flow from the burst box. Some they recovered by the scooping handful; others rolled away, bouncing like worthless pebbles over the deck, dribbling off the scuppers and into the sea.

"What have we got here?" Hawkins was chortling gleefully as he hopped around, retrieving all the stones that rolled his way. "What have we here, eh? What—what have we got!"

Brood rose, stretching up to his full height.

"I'll tell you what we've got!" he roared, in a tone so loud that the rest stopped, looking up at him in wonder. "We've got my treasure—the one I found in Peru last winter—the one I was taking you, Hawkins, and you, professor, to see when that blamed steamer sank and stranded us!"

"Oh, I can prove it! This bar of gold that Hoxley's opened up for us—didn't he say it must have come from South America; that it could only have been modeled in that brick form by an old-time race like the Aztecs or the Incas?"

"This box, here—ask the professor if he doesn't recognize it as the handiwork of those same ancient Incas. He knows. He's been below Panama times enough, and studied South American customs and tribal ways often enough, to tell you that I'm right.

"Think of it!" Brood threw up his arms. "Think of the howling, unheard-of luck. Here I am, on my way back to Peru, with a capitalist in tow, whom I'm trying to persuade to put up enough coin to help me surmount the difficulties of getting this treasure out of the wilds and into civilization and circulation—and I suddenly blunder on it, all crated, marked 'handle with care,' and delivered to my door! Can you beat it?"

With a jubilant whoop, the young man kicked up his heels and danced a jig for joy.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A PASSENGER.

Vaine grinned at Hawkins.

"So that was what you were bound South for, eh?" He poked the millionaire in the ribs. "You swallowed a story of buried treasure and came down to investigate? Well, I'm darned!"

Hawkins drew back pompously.

"I don't understand your references to my 'swallowing' anything, sir!" he declared indignantly. With a look out of the corner of his eye for Brood, he went on: "When I first heard the story of what this gentleman had found in Peru I was much impressed. I saw not only truth in his story, but a generous

heart in him, who at the time of our initial meeting made me the offer of a half share in his discovery, which I gratefully accepted at its face value in business fairness as well as prospect of monetary return!"

He stopped, panting. Out of the corner of his other eye he peeped at the engineer.

"What do you think of it, eh?" the latter was still exulting, slapping Vaine on the back as he came to the breakdown at the end of his jig. "Did you ever hear of such luck? Landing on this boat, a derelict, stowed away in whose hold is my own treasure!"

Hawkins suddenly frowned.

"But," he put in sharply, "how does this stuff happen to be here? You said it was in Peru—that you were the only one who knew anything about it——"

"I don't know," Brood answered soberly. "I don't understand. This is a mystery, for a fact!"

Vaine began to rub his knuckles; then caught himself, and thrust his hands behind him. He nudged the engineer.

"Now, why do *you* suppose," he asked, "that the ship was deserted with a treasure on board the size of *this*?"

"That's a deeper mystery," Brood replied gravely. "Everything seems to be a mystery, though, straight through this business!"

"I wonder," mused the reporter, "whether anybody else was ever in a fix just like this? Here we are, with several million dollars to our credit, marooned on a perfectly seaworthy vessel without a crew, unable to sail ourselves, and standing an excellent chance of never altering our situation in the slightest degree. Of course, now we couldn't desert this ship to swim to any other one that comes in sight of us. We'd lose our precious treasure then. And we can't allow ourselves to be taken into port by the crew of another craft. We're technically a derelict, and the salvage would gobble up our cargo——"

"Rubbish!" interrupted the financier. "You talk pretty big, it seems to me, of 'our' this and 'our' that. You're not in on the treasure, understand. You don't figure anywhere——"

"Oh, yes, he does!" announced Brood. "We're all together in this, share and share alike. You'll get your fifth, Vaine, with Hawkins'. So will you, professor. And you, too, Reegan."

The stoker slouched forward.

"Would yuh mind puttin' that in writin'?"

"What——"

"A bit o' memoranday offern comes in handy," Reegan explained. "'Specially when dealin' with gent'men, I allus sez. Gent'men, they've got short mem'ries at times. Werry short *at* times!"

"I side with Reegan," said Vaine. "A little written agreement would make me feel better, as—er—I'm dealing with a financier!"

To settle the matter at once they adjourned to the cabin. There writing paper, pens, and ink were found. Rustling around in the drawers of the table, a bottle of brandy was encountered. This was set out for a dram all around to celebrate the final drawing up of the partnership document.

It fell quite naturally to the lot of the reporter to take the pen and indite the memoranda of agreement. Seated at one end of the table, he scribbled industriously while the others sat talking on the opposite side.

Suddenly Brood, looking up, saw the pen swinging idly in the newspaper man's fingers, while he was propped bolt upright in his chair, staring straight before him with wide eyes and hanging jaw. The engineer looked over his shoulder. The breath escaped his lungs in a sigh as he gazed at the object of Vaine's fixed vision.

Framed in the open doorway of a stateroom opening into the cabin was a young and beautiful girl.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A TALE OF TREACHERY.

As the five men stared at her in blank amazement, the girl put up her hand and leaned, as though very, very tired, against the jamb of the door. Her lips moved.

"They are really gone," she whispered. "Thank Heaven for that!"

And then she swayed forward in a dead faint. Brood caught her in his outstretched arms. He carried her slight form over to his empty chair without much effort.

"Let me have that brandy bottle here!" he ordered. "Tip the head up—not so far, you fool! There, that's better. Gently, now. So!"

He managed to pour a little of the fiery liquid down her throat. With a shudder, she stirred, opened her eyelids, and looked blankly about her.

"There, Miss Deveraux!" said Alec Brood, smiling. "You feel better now?"

The wide, blue eyes of the girl surveyed him seriously.

"Do I know you, sir?" she asked.

Swiftly she glanced around at the others, and the color the spirits had brought to her cheek faded, leaving her pale. She half rose from her chair. "Have I made a mistake? Are you members of that horrible band——"

"Calm yourself, pray!" said Brood. He continued to smile reassuringly. "Be quite satisfied that we are not members of any 'band' that could be given such an appellation as that. As you seem to have been on this boat before us, and could well look upon our presence as a trespass if you chose, let me introduce the party and tell you the story of how we come to be here."

Forthwith he gave an account of their shipwreck, exile on the island, and rescue by the abandoned vessel.

"You do not know me, Miss Deveraux," he finished; "nor have I ever met you before. But I have seen you often enough—as *La Tosca*, *Juliet*, *Carmen*—from a box at the Théâtre Royal, in Brazil, the Alcazar, in Lima, and in several other opera houses in South America. I would recognize you anywhere, out of costume though you are, and even without the identification of your superb voice!"

The girl contrived a smile and a tiny bow.

"But to find you here!" Brood went on. "Alone on a deserted ship! I cannot but believe that it was against your

will you came in such a plight. Am I right?"

The young woman lowered her head for a moment in an effort to collect herself. In the light of the swinging lamp that had been lighted above the table, her fair hair shone like spun gold, its heavy masses over brow and temples casting a softening shadow on the drawn and pathetically thin face below. At last she looked up.

"You are right," she began, in a low tone that had music in its every syllable. "That is, partly right. It was not entirely of my own choosing that I came to be in that stateroom from which you saw me come just now. But perhaps my story had better be begun at the beginning.

"The opera company with which I have been touring the South American countries for the past three years, Mr. Brood, met with utter failure in Peru not long since. 'Stranded' is the technical term for every member of the troupe in Lima two months ago who had no private funds on which to return North.

"I—my salary, barring traveling and living expenses, has always gone for the support of my family back home. Therefore, when the company failed, in arrears with the pay roll, of course, I was stuck in the Peruvian capital hard and fast.

"I wrote to friends for steamer fare home. While I waited for response, I was isolated in a cheap hotel owned by a Portuguese. Days and weeks passed, and still no money came. Soon I was in debt for a three weeks' board bill. Every day I felt that I was likely to be put into the street. My predicament was terrible, terrible—alone in a country of strangers, where even my own tongue was not spoken.

"And then, one day, a man who had followed me, off and on for many months wherever I sang, found me out. He wormed out of the Portuguese proprietor my financial state. Then he came to me with an offer of relief from my dilemma. The offer was in the form of a proposal of marriage. And the man was Captain Jack McGar!"



For the first time Vaine spoke.

"Pardon me," he asked, leaning forward interestedly, "do you mean *the* McGar—the so-called 'Hell-bent Jack'?"

"Yes," said the diva. "You have heard of him?"

The reporter smiled grimly.

"Very few who know anything of the doings of the world's famous bad men," he answered, "have escaped hearing of the captain. In wickedness it might be said of him that 'he is of a vintage.'"

"Yes, he is a man more utterly devoid of the one spark of goodness we are told the worst have in them than any other of God's creatures I have ever read or heard of," said the girl. "A rascal, double-dyed and deceitful. As you shall hear from me.

"This was not the first time that Captain McGar had sued for my hand, nor was it the dozenth, but I declined his compliment. A week he pleaded with me to change my mind. Then he went away.

"A fortnight dragged by. Still no remittance came from the friends to whom I had appealed. My landlord was growing surly, insulting. Things were truly at a desperate stage when the American consul appeared.

"A pleasant Yankee youth he was. He told me that he had heard of my straits—the Portuguese, he said, had reported to him that I, an American, was defrauding him out of lodgings and board, and had appealed to the United States Government, through its representative, to settle my due and deport me—and he knew of a way to help me out.

"A party of my fellow-countrymen tourists were returning to San Francisco in their sailing yacht. They would take me with them if I cared to go. He, the consul, would pay my bills and debit the government for them in the regular course of business. Would I accept such help?

"I was willing for almost anything. I packed my trunks, had them sent to the good Samaritans' boat, and waited in a fever of impatience for night, when I was to go on board. All was quiet on the yacht when I arrived about ten

o'clock of a pitch-black, moonless night. I went at once to my stateroom.

"And we were far out to sea the next morning, when I opened my door and came face to face with the 'tourist' who was so kindly bearing me away from my troubles—

"Captain Jack McGar!"

## CHAPTER X.

### THE DESERTERS.

For a few moments Miss Deveraux was silent, her face buried in her hands.

"Tricked," she continued at last, "by this man, who had laid his trap—so cleverly that he had fooled even the consul—to get me on board a ship of his own, and who meant to marry me in spite of myself by so doing, for I was absolutely helpless.

"No use, out of sight of land, to appeal for aid to anybody on board the vessel. Such a crew—the men with whom Captain McGar had surrounded himself were, like him, rascals to the core!

"I had sooner been among savages than on the sea with these rakings of the lowest type of ruffians to be found in a month's journey up and down the South American coast—cutthroats, thieves, smugglers, what not that was criminal and depraved.

"And with what a leader! From the moment I shrank back at first sight of him on the threshold of my stateroom, Captain McGar held me in mortal terror in or out of his sight.

"Quite plainly, now that I was in his power, he told me that I should be his whether I would or no. He would make me wed him.

"Taking a small but serviceable revolver from my corsage, I showed it to him.

"'With this,' I promised, 'the first time you so much as lay your finger's weight upon me, I will kill myself. Remember.'

"McGar laughed; nevertheless, I was unmolested for several days as the ship sailed on—where to? I did not know. What our destination was, and the fate that awaited me there, I could not tell.

Can anything worse be imagined than my situation at the mercy of this arch rogue and his pack of underlings? Every hour, minute, second was torture of the keenest sort to nerves and body harassed to the point of distraction.

"Then one night things came to a crisis. Captain McGar and his men had been drinking heavily for several days. Coming from a breath of air on deck, as I passed through the cabin where my would-be husband and a chosen few of his fellow knaves were sprawling, the captain threw his arm around me at the threshold of my room.

"I shook him off, stepped inside, and slammed and bolted the door in his face. There was a look in his eyes, half doubt, half fear, as I struggled out of his clasp and shot a significant glance at him before the door separated us.

"He remembered my promise, and he knew that his action had called for a settlement of my part of the agreement. But would I do as I had threatened? Of that he was skeptical, and at the same time afraid, fearful lest I should take my own life, and so cheat him out of the aim he had wrought mightily to accomplish.

"Inside the stateroom I did not falter. Walking to the center of the apartment, I took out my pistol and cocked it with a firm finger. Then I pressed the muzzle to my forehead.

"For the sin of suicide I hoped I would be forgiven in that I was avoiding in this way a greater crime. Then I threw up my head, curved my finger around the trigger—

"And just then an eerie, blood-curdling scream rang out in the cabin.

"Startled, I lowered the weapon. Another fearful, wailing screech, as of a lost soul going down to eternal torment. And then a riot of excited voices filled the cabin outside my door.

"In the general din I could not make out what had happened. Then there was a lull, and on the silence fell the voice of Captain McGar. It was plain that he addressed his crew. From what I heard, they wanted to leave the ship—for what reason I do not know—and he was urging them to stay.

"A stemless torrent of refusal welled up from the cutthroat rabble. Out of the Bedlam rose the shout of one of the captain's henchmen, siding with his chief in the argument that the crew remain. His voice was snuffed out in the crack of a pistol. Again pandemonium reigned.

"Then another lull, and Captain McGar agreed to desert the ship with his crew. Scampering footsteps running out of the cabin rose at once. All outside my door was silent. From the deck above I heard hoarse shouting, rough commands, and the noise as of the small boat being lowered over the side.

"And then, lightly, craftily, somebody's fingers went scraping up and down and across my stateroom door.

"The cabin was not entirely deserted. It was as I had begun to suspect. This was a ruse to draw me out. The crew, in their frantic demands to be allowed to abandon the vessel, were only playing their parts in an impromptu theatrical, arranged and stage-directed by Captain Jack McGar. There was no intention of leaving the ship at all!

"The screams, the shots I had heard, and that tramping about and shouting on the deck above, all—all were tricks being played upon me. And now, waiting outside my door, the captain himself lurked to catch me unaware.

"All was silence. I raised my revolver and deliberately aimed it at the panels of oak before me. Intending to foil that villain outside with a bullet that might pierce the wood and find his heart, so ending forever his machinations against me and others, I fired.

"When the reverberations of the report had done ricocheting from the walls around me, I listened. An instant only the silence held. And then there was a rattle of pulleys and blocks from above. I heard a smash of something solid striking the water, and then—silence deeper than before.

"That was three days ago. Three—" The girl stopped, the color streaming from her face, and gripped the table edge before her tightly. "Three days since"—she smiled faintly—"since the silence—and—"

With a sigh, she collapsed.

Chafing her wrists, trying to force brandy between her clenched teeth, Brood on one side and Vaine on the other sought to restore her to consciousness. At last she opened her eyes.

"What is it?" asked Brood.

"I—I'm just a little hungry," said the opera star weakly. "I didn't dare step out of that stateroom ever since—since three days ago, till to-night!"

The engineer started for the galley.

"Good Lord!" he muttered. "She's starving—been half dead for the want of food all the time we've kept her talking. What beasts we were!"

He brought back biscuits, tinned meats, a sumptuous repast of all the delicacies afforded by the well-stocked larder of the ship. These the girl devoured daintily, till she could eat no more.

"Miss Deveraux," said Vaine when she sat back at last, "one question, if you don't mind? It's this: Did you ever hear anything of what the cargo of this vessel was while you were on board with that gang?"

Her eyes lighted.

"Oh, yes!" said she. "I almost forgot. There's a wonderful treasure down in the hold some place. Let me tell you all about it!"

## CHAPTER XI.

### A MYSTERY DEEPENS.

Miss Deveraux paused a moment to collect her thoughts, and then turned to Brood.

"One day," she began, "Captain McGar told me that if I would consent to marry him, he would make me the richest woman in the world—a princess of wealth, an empress of fortune, such as never walked the earth before.

"Of course, I took his words 'to be nothing but idle vaporings, boasts. Perhaps he *was* comfortably well to do; indeed, he might be the possessor of quite a tidy sum accumulated at various times in evil ways; but surely he, an adventurer, wandering over South America without home or permanent address, was not a Midas.

"Then he told me. Somehow he had come upon information of a buried treasure. You remember I said he disappeared after calling on me at the boarding house in Lima? As soon as he left me, he had assembled his ruffian friends and set out with them inland, seeking the location of the treasure.

"On the banks of the Urubamba River, across the Andes, he found it—a storehouse built ages and ages ago by an ancient race of Indians. I think he called them Incas. A fortnight and the cache was gutted. Back to the coast they put with their loot. Rigging out this ship and loading their cargo in the hold, with me on board by grace of trickery, sail was set and away for a port unknown.

"Captain McGar tried to get me below to inspect the hoard stored there. If I would be his wife, he said, half of his share in this treasure should be mine. I refused even to go near the hold. Then he began bringing me specimens of the stuff to tempt me. Once it was a bar of pure gold. And once an ornament, grotesquely carved, that was some sort of an idol, hewn out of a solid nugget that must have weighed half as much as a man.

"Still another time he poured a heaping handful of unset jewels in my lap. Flashing up at me were rubies, emeralds, pearls, opals—easily worth thousands. I ordered him to remove them. And he obeyed by throwing them, with a muttered curse, into the water.

"Plainly the wealth counted as nothing against his failure to attain the ambition of his life—making me his. Either that, or—the treasure in the hold was so immense, so limitless, that a sacrifice of a fraction of it, worth a prince's ransom, was a matter of little moment!"

She stopped.

"There!" said she, looking, as one sure of a dramatic effect upon her hearers, round at the men who encircled the table in the dim-lit cabin. "You didn't know, did you, when you clambered aboard this 'derelict,' what was hidden under its deck? You didn't realize your luck——"



Again her voice halted. Her animation fled as she stared at the others, all with their eyes lowered at the floor.

"Why," she exclaimed, "what's the matter? Why aren't you elated? You're sitting there so stiffly, glumly. Don't you understand that those men are gone, that they've left the ship, their treasure, and that now it all belongs to us?"

Vaine spoke.

"We've already seen the treasure," he said. "Parts of it, that is. One of us knew all about it before ever we set eyes on this ship."

He kept his gaze on the table.

With the rest, he was thinking of the men who had deserted that craft. The black-hearted crew. The most timid of mortals would not be likely to abandon such wealth as was in the hold of this vessel unless menaced tremendously. And yet these hardened villains had given up their loot—for not a reason on earth that could be discovered!

The ship had not been in danger of sinking. Three days the girl said it was since they left. Still the craft was afloat. It was out of the question that it could ever have been threatened with foundering.

No mutiny—as Brood had previously suggested—could have caused the crew's departure. It wasn't the captain found dead here in the cabin at all. It was the henchman of McGar, whom the girl in her stateroom adjoining had overheard shot down at the time of the dispute in the cabin. The cap had probably been left on the table and forgotten by McGar himself.

McGar—as Brood looked at the opera singer opposite, the climax to the mystery dawned on him. Not only had the leader of the gang of devil-may-care men left ship and treasure—he had deserted this girl, whom he was obsessed as by a mania to possess.

Why?

Something might have transpired to make him leave the gold and gems in the hold. But stronger than his natural desire for wealth was his abnormal desire for Janet Deveraux!

He had moved heaven and earth, up to but a short time ago, to get her in his clutches. Did it fit the determined character of the man to be won over almost without resistance by his hirelings' arguments for abandoning the vessel—which meant the relinquishment of the girl after she was in his power?

This, at any rate, was plain: Whatever it was that had driven the hellish crew to depart without taking from the treasure they were leaving behind, to judge from the story of their frenzied flight, so much as a piece of gold, a single gem—

Whatever it was that had made McGar run away from the contents of the hold, representing, as it did, position and power in the world—

It had been something urgent enough, too, to make the captain give up his life's ambition—the attainment of this young woman's hand.

The "something" was as yet hidden completely from the men now aboard the ship. It was impossible to conjecture what could have rid the vessel of its former passengers.

But here was creepily cold consolation:

Whatever it was that had menaced those others who were gone now menaced them. They were on the ship of mystery, prisoners there. And they could not help but find out, by actual experience, the answer to the enigma!

## CHAPTER XII.

### NO CLEWS.

Imagine the disappointment to the girl, barricaded for days in her stateroom, locked behind the door whose threshold she dared not cross for fear of what might lay beyond, at last coming out at the goad of actual starvation, finding her enemy and his followers gone, their place taken by these harmless men, whom she looked upon as her rescuers, only to learn now that they, like herself, were helpless on board this unhelmed boat!

Their plight was explained to her. Unable to sail the vessel, afraid to attempt its steering lest they come to in-

stant wreck, they were stranded here on the sea as they had been on land, their only hope a passing craft that might give them succor.

To keep sharp lookout for chance sails on their horizon was the only thing they could do. Then and there the five divided a watch among them, so that, night or day, some one should always be on deck. Though the girl urged that she be included in the arrangement, her services were at once rejected.

It was pitch dark outside. A search was made for rockets. In a locker in the cabin a supply was found. A few they carried up on deck and sent aloft at ten-minute intervals till that allotment was exhausted. For fear of wasting all the fireworks at once on a surrounding of vacant sea, they then went below.

All save Hawkins, that is, whose duty it was to stay on deck till past midnight, beginning the watch.

It was scant rest that any of the party had through that first, miserable night. Morning dawned to find them sunken of eye and haggard.

Joining Reagan, whose daylight trick on deck was just ending, the others scanned a barren waste of water lying to stern, bow, starboard, and port. Not a trace of a sail, a thread of steamer smoke, however tiny, met their straining eyes.

The ship was moving leisurely on, and on, and on, bound who knows where. Breakfast was taken on deck. Hours dragged monotonously by. Noon. Another interminable stretch of uneventful hours. Sunset—then, with the swiftness of the tropic zone, night.

A few cautious rockets were sent up, bringing no response from the black wall around them beyond which a steamer, or another vessel like their own, might or might not be. That night passed, as had the other, uneventfully.

It was the same thing the next day as the one before. The next was its replica. Sometimes the ship hung becalmed for hours at a time, stock-still on an oily sea. Again it went bowling over the waves at racing speed under

the urging of fresh winds that always blew the craft—nowhere.

"Lord, this is awful!" groaned the financier, leaning wearily against the rail at mid-afternoon of the fourth day. "Watching, waiting, drifting—always drifting—and not a speck of sail, not one, anywhere. Looks like it was going to keep up forever."

He passed his hand through his hair.

"The deadly sameness!" he whined. "The cursed hour-after-hour nothing-doingness. I'd welcome almost anything as a relief from this. I wish—I wish the ship would go down! I'd rather have her sink and end it all, I swear, than to stay aboard the old hulk the way she keeps meandering round!"

Brood turned.

"I've been thinking," said he, "that we ought to have something to busy ourselves with. The monotony of this isn't any better for the rest of us than it is for you. We ought to find something to do."

He looked around him thoughtfully. Suddenly his eye brightened. He struck his palms together.

"I've got it!" he cried. "We'll build a raft!"

Vaine glared at him.

"What the devil——" He frowned, puzzled. "What do we need of a raft, for Heaven's sake? Do you think we could do better if we were on the sea with something we could paddle?"

Hoxley came forward.

"A raft?" he repeated. "You forget the treasure. We couldn't get away with that on a raft, you know. Better stick to the ship, don't you think, and—and go on waiting for some vessel to come in sight?"

"We'll stick to the ship," said the engineer, "as long as the ship will let us. You said, Hawkins, you wished the vessel would go down? Well, how do we know that it won't any time?"

The millionaire's face paled.

"Do you mean——" he began anxiously.

"There's no danger of it that I know of," Brood reassured him. "But you never can tell what's going to happen. Just imagine that the ship should sink.



There's no boat. What would become of us if the vessel should quietly slip from underfoot, not in a wreck that would break off anything cling-to-able, you understand, but just drop to the bottom all of a sudden, without warning?"

It was a startling idea.

"Of course, we'd drown," the young man remarked. He bit his lip as his eyes encountered the figure of Miss Deveraux up in the bow, her back turned toward them at the moment. "We can't afford to take chances," he continued, in a lower tone. "There's plenty of building material around us—woodwork, the cabin frame, which wouldn't be a hardship to do without, and so on. Now, while we've got the chance, let's get busy!"

A carpenter's kit was unearthed below. With hatchets, hammers, and saws, the roof and sides of the cabin were torn down. Laid out on the cleared space in the deck's stern, the boards were trimmed, cut, and got ready.

Busily now the days passed. Still the ship roamed the sea, never sighting another craft, almost never becalmed any longer. With human perversity, malign and crafty as a monster of cruelty in the flesh, the vessel seemed to take its way around the waters in studied avoidance of such craft as were afloat.

And now a week had gone by since the five men climbed the rope and dropped over the side upon this floating jail. A week had passed since their discovery of the ship's desertion by its former passengers—since the mystery of that abandonment had confronted them.

The expectation of seeing the mystery solved by a manifestation of what had driven the others off was unfulfilled. Whatever they had looked for to happen while they occupied the vessel had not materialized. Everything on board seemed as it should be. Not a strange sound was heard. Not one single, extraordinary occurrence disturbed either their days or nights.

It was queer—more odd than any demonstration would have been.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### WHAT?

"Reegan, run down and get me that brace and bit!"

Brood, standing over the improvised raft, which had taken on form in the ensuing two days at a rapid rate, turned from contemplation of the work to address the stoker.

"I left it on the table in the cabin as I passed through this noon," the engineer went on. "You'll see it staring you in the face. Hurry up!"

Reegan laid aside his hammer.

"So the mighty achievement won't delay in its completion," said the girl, picking up the tool and kneeling above the half-driven nail from which Reegan rose. "I'll keep your place open for you, Mr. Reegan, till you get back!"

Brood fell in with her mood as she whacked the plank two inches away from the spike with her first stroke.

"And you'll still have that nail to drive when you take up your job!" he called after the departing stoker. "Miss Deveraux missed it again. For the love of Mike, don't be long!"

The opera singer had proved herself a brick since making the acquaintance of the others on shipboard. Relief at finding herself out of a predicament far worse than anything else she could imagine had worked a wonderful change in her from the first hour of their meeting.

It spoke ill for Captain Jack McGar—perhaps now at rest on the ocean's bottom with the rest of his kind, who might not have prospered in their small boat—that she could find relief and light-heartedness in this dilemma—marooned on a drifting ship in mid-ocean.

Never a word of complaint had she uttered against their fate. Instead, hers was always the first laugh heard of mornings on the otherwise dismal vessel; the last thing at night came some quip or jest from her lips to brace the others for the next day's ordeal.

Brood, glad of her courage and inspiring gayety—forced though it sometimes was—did all that he could to fol-



low her lead in cheering the others by an example of smiling front to the dreary predicament in which they were all ensnared.

"How much longer are you going to be?" she asked of him. "Haven't you come to the limit of your ingenuity in placing and replacing boards side by side and end on end, then nailing them together, and ripping them apart again?"

Brood laughed.

"I'm trying to make this, the first and only thing of its sort I ever attempted or expect to attempt, something that I can tell my grandchildren about with senile snickers of self-approbation in years to come. It's my *chef-d'œuvre*—my masterpiece!"

She sat back on her heels, her head critically tilted.

"It's something you might well be proud of," she commented. "And you never took even a lesson?"

"Not one!"

"Remarkable. Really astonishing. For one your age, too. I predict, sir, a future for you that will be positively dazzling—in the chicken-coop-making industry."

"Chicken coop!" The engineer snorted his indignation. "This is to be something a little bit more pretentious than that, madam, let me inform you. You are beholding in process of construction—be properly awed—the only handmade combination church-steeple storm door, portable ping-pong court, non-shrinkable political platform ever conceived and executed!"

"Mercy!" she exclaimed. "How did you ever think of it? Such a long-felt want as it will supply! You're so clever!"

"You flatterer!" Brood bowed. "Some time I will be more than delighted to relate to you in detail how, in the dead of night, after eating a rather large dinner of green-turtle soup, followed by oysters, broiled trout, a sirloin three inches thick, all the fresh vegetables that were out of season and in the restaurant, I dreamed——"

"Don't!" murmured the girl. Her eyes were large and swimming, and her lips had lost their smile as she checked

the young man's thoughtless chatter at sight of the others' faces.

The scientist cleared his throat several times in a hacking style, abruptly scrambled to his feet and strolled off.

Brood looked appealingly at the singer, deep contrition on his countenance.

"I didn't mean——" He stopped. There seemed nothing to say. "Why the deuce doesn't Reagan come back with that auger?" he snapped roughly.

He looked over his shoulder in the direction of the companionway. From below a sound arose, mounting higher and higher, louder and yet more clear.

A wail—the shriek of some one in mortal terror.

It brought Brood to his feet. The girl rose swiftly, her color gone. A trembling hand was laid on the young man's arm.

"That," said she, her voice shaking, "that is the same sound I heard in the cabin before——"

She shrank back. Again that scream—harrowing, marrow chilling. It came from the cabin. Hawkins, standing agape, stared with popping eyes toward the dismantled framework. Vaine, wheeled from the rail, took a step toward the spot as Hoxley joined the awed group.

Out on the deck burst Reagan. With another terror-stricken yell, he bounded toward them, fleeing in a bee line away from the companion ladder up which he had dashed.

Straight for Brood he aimed. As he drew nearer they saw his face. It was purple, set with bulging white eyes, horribly contorted in a grimace of the most ghastly horror and fright.

He fell groveling at the engineer's feet. There, gibbering for a spell of seconds, then suddenly screaming, shrieking, he writhed, clawing Brood's legs, burying his face on the deck.

TO BE CONTINUED.

*The next section of this serial will appear in the June TOP-NOTCH, out May 1st. Back numbers may be had of the publishers or news dealers at any time.*

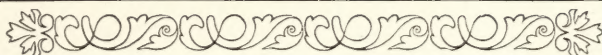
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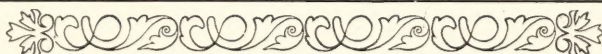
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